

THE
WORKS

Of the late

Reverend and Learned

Mr. *Joseph Stennett.*

VOL. II.

Containing Fifteen SERMONS never before
publish'd.



LONDON:

Printed in the YEAR M.DCC.XXXI.

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PHIL. ii. 21.

*For all seek their own, not the things which
are Jesus Christ's.*



WHEN christianity was first plant-
ed in the world, that great prin-
ciple of it, which our Saviour
so frequently inculcated on his
disciples, namely, that it was
necessary to *deny themselves, and
take up their cross and follow him*^a, was not
only readily entertained in their minds, but
appeared in the whole course of their lives :
they seemed to be so intirely taken up with

^a Luke 9. 23.

the service of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom they own'd they had the greatest obligations; and their minds were so thorowly imbued with charity, that bond of perfection, and most eminent badge of christianity, that they thought nothing too much to do for the publick service and interest of the christian church. As they were ready to lay down their lives for the sake of the Lord Jesus, and were even ambitious of the crown of martyrdom; so they were ready to spend their estates, and hazard their lives too, for the service of the brethren, and for the advancement of their true interest and edification. Not only the ministers, but the people in general were engaged in this good design, and inspired with this generous temper; they seemed all to mind the same thing, and each of them to lose his own interest in that of the christian community. The ministers thought no labour too hard to be sustained, no sufferings too great to be endured, provided they might bring honour to the name of Christ, and be serviceable to his church. Thus our apostle, a little before the words of our text, generously declares to the Philippians, that if he were *offered upon the sacrifice and service of their faith, he should joy and rejaice with them all*^b: he was willing, for the promotion of the interest of their souls, to expose himself to the greatest hazards and

^b Ver. 17.

sufferings; and if it had been possible or lawful, he could even have *wished himself accursed from Christ*^c, to have been under the most severe anathema, if this would have contributed to the salvation of the Jews. The people, in imitation of this noble pattern of their ministers, were so forward to advance the name of Christ, and to promote the common interest of religion, that, if it had been possible, they would have *pluck'd out their eyes and given them to them*^d; and to save their lives, were *willing to lay down their own necks*^e: so much were they bent to promote the good of the publick; and so earnestly did they desire the propagation of the gospel, that they would have been glad to have preserv'd those lives, which were most necessary to this end, at the expence of their own blood. And for defraying the extraordinary charge which attended the first publication of the christian religion, as well as for the support of their necessitous brethren under the difficulties and persecutions which were then so common to them; it was usual for those who had estates in land or houses, to sell them^f, and to put the money into a publick fund, to carry on the same good design of advancing the true religion in the world.

^c Rom. 9. 3.

^d Gal. 4. 15.

^e Rom. 16. 4.

^f Acts 4. 34—37.

But it was not long that this generous temper of mind reign'd universally among christians : Satan soon sowed tares among the wheat ; hypocrites introduced themselves by a specious profession into the christian communities ; and in a little time great numbers in the church appeared to be quite of another disposition. So that the apostle had occasion to complain of the narrowness of their spirits, and of their sensuality ; of their supine neglect of the things of religion, while they took care, on the contrary, to indulge themselves in the enjoyment of sensible things. Therefore in speaking to these Philippians he uses these pathetick words : *For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ ; whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame ; who mind earthly things* *. And in the words of our text he laments that *all sought their own things, and not the things of Jesus Christ* : not that they were universally become so corrupt and degenerate ; but this unhappy temper so generally obtain'd amongst them, that it was rare to find a man so generous and disinterested, and who had so pure and single a regard to the honour of God and the good of the publick, that it might be truly said of him that *he sought the things of Christ, and disregarded his own*. Some instances indeed there might be found, but

* Phil. 3. 18, 19.

they

they were not common. The apostle mentions one in his son Timothy, in whose commendation he speaks in this chapter: *But I trust, says he, in the Lord Jesus, to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort when I know your state. For I have no man like-minded, who will naturally care for your state*^h. i. e. “ I have no man with
 “ me in whom I can so confide, or that hath
 “ so tender a regard to you, and so natural a
 “ sympathy; that is touched with all your
 “ afflictions, and lays to heart all your concerns. I have no man like-minded, I can
 “ hardly find a man of his temper and excellent
 “ spirit:” *For all, that is, the generality, seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s.*

This is a very sad complaint of the apostle, and added affliction, to be sure, to his bonds: for he was now a prisoner at Rome, and wrote to these Philippians with the greatest tenderness and compassion that was possible for a man to express; tho at the same time he took occasion to censure them for those irregularities which were among them. And it seems very probable, that the apostle does not only in these words reflect upon those christians who were with him at Rome, of whom he could hardly find a man fit to be sent to Philippi, who would have a tender and natural care for their state; but that he insinuates, after his genteel manner, that there were among these Philippians, as well as

^h Ver. 19, 20.

other churches, too many who too intensely minded *their own things*, while they neglected the *things that were Jesus Christ's*.

In treating on these words, I shall,

- I. Inquire what it is for men *to seek their own things*; and what *to seek the things of Jesus Christ*.
- II. I shall inquire into some of the main causes which so commonly dispose men, even christians, *to seek their own things, and not the things of Christ*.
- III. I shall shew the reasons why we should *seek the things of Christ* rather than *our own*; and the unreasonableness of the contrary procedure.

I. We are to inquire what it is for men to *seek their own things, and not the things of Christ*. And here we must consider, first, what is meant by *our own things, and the things of Christ* which are opposed to our own; and then what is meant by *seeking our own things*, in opposition to those of Christ.

1. What is meant by *our own things*, and by *the things of Christ*. This concise manner of expression is common to the apostle Paul; and there is a beauty and elegancy in this comprehensive way of speaking. *Our own things* may either signify *human things*, those things which belong to our temporal state, and the accommodation of human life in this world, in opposition to *the things of Christ*,

Christ, that is, divine things which regard our spiritual and everlasting interest: or, *our own things*, as oppos'd to *the things of Christ*, may signify our own private interest and advantage, in opposition to the interest of Christ, and to the publick advantage of his church.

If we interpret the words in the former sense, we find there are like expressions in the new testament. When our Saviour rebukes Peter, because he would have persuaded him to secure himself from the sufferings of the cross, he uses these terms; *Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men*¹: q. d. "Thou seemest to have no relish for some of those divine truths which are agreeable to the nature of God, and essential to the christian religion; for such are those that relate to my crucifixion: but thou reasonest from the sentiments of human nature, and the principles of human policy, to persuade me to avoid the sufferings of the cross. Thou art taken with the things of this world, and art projecting how I may immediately obtain a temporal kingdom, and that without suffering; and art disgusted with the scheme of things which the divine wisdom has constituted, by which I am appointed first to suffer, and so to enter into my glory; into a kingdom as far above the idea thou hast form'd in thy mind, as heaven is above the earth."

¹ Mat. 16. 23.

Again, *What man*, says our apostle to the Corinthians, *knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of a man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God^k*. Here the truths of christianity are called *the things of God*, and *the things of the spirit of God^l*, in opposition to the *things of a man*; that is, to the sentiments and notions of men. *What man knows the things of a man*; that is, the notions, the sentiments and projects which pass in the mind of a man, *but the spirit of a man that is in him?* who is conscious to his own thoughts: so *the things of God*, the great truths of the christian religion, the counsels of God relating to our salvation, *are known to none but the Spirit of God*, or those to whom that Spirit shall reveal them. The same apostle speaks in like manner in another place: *But I would have you without carefulness: he that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife^m*. Where the apostle designs to shew, that those who were in an unmarried state, at that time especially, when christianity was first planted in the world, had greater opportunity to mind religion, and the affairs of their souls, than those persons who were married, and consequently incumbred with the cares of

^k 1 Cor. 2. 11.

^l Ver. 14.

^m 1 Cor. 7. 32.

this world, and taken up with the things of this life. So that here temporal things, which belong to human life, are opposed to *the things of the Lord*; that is, the things of religion. According to this account therefore, the sense of the words is this: "*All*
 "*seek their own things*, i. e. to gratify their
 "own thoughts, to accomplish their own
 "designs and projects; are fond of their
 "own notions and sentiments; seek their
 "own temporal satisfaction in the things
 "which belong to this life, the things of
 "this world: *and none seek the things of*
 "*Christ*; i. e. none are so concern'd as they
 "ought to be for the advancement of divine
 "truth, and for the propagation of religion
 "in the world."

If we interpret these words as opposing our own private advantage to the publick interest of religion, you will find there are like phrases also used in the holy scripture to justify this interpretation. The apostle is recommending a publick spirit as one of the excellent characters of a mind in which christian charity reigns, in opposition to a narrow and selfish disposition, when he says, *Charity doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own* ⁿ, &c. that is, a man inspired with charity is more concerned and employed about the advantage of the publick than about his own private interest. And this is true of charity, not only as it disposes men to em-

ⁿ 1 Cor. 13. 5.

ploy their money for the benefit of others, as well as of themselves ; but as it is a virtue which makes men disinterested on many other accounts, so as to prefer the publick good to any particular interest of their own.

Our apostle, in this chapter wherein is our text, hath a phrase which may give us yet more light into this matter : *Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others*°, &c. Some think the meaning of these words is, that we should not turn our eyes so much on our own gifts and abilities, and so determine our thoughts to ourselves, as to overlook the good qualities of others ; lest for want of duly considering what God hath bestowed on others, we should be tempted to over-value ourselves : because the apostle had said in the words before, *Let nothing be done thro' strife and vain-glory ; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves*°. But others interpret these words by those which follow : *Look not every man on his own things* ; that is, be not so much concerned about your own private interest as about the affairs of others, so as to promote a common good ; because it follows, *Let the same mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus* : i. e. aspire to be like your Saviour, and imitate his generous example ; *who humbled himself, and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross*°, merely for the benefit of others, and of such

° Phil. 2. 4.

° Ver. 3.

| ° Ver. 5, 9.

who were intirely unworthy of his favour. If we understand the words in the last sense, then they are agreeable to the purpose spoken of before: if in the former sense, then they shew we are not to content ourselves in seeking the advancement of our own knowledge, the improvement of our own minds, and the acquisition of such abilities as may render us valuable in the world; but we should prefer to this the desire of being useful and serviceable to the souls of other men. It is not sufficient that we cultivate our own minds, and advance in knowledge and learning, unless the talents we acquire be improved for the publick good.

Yet farther; the apostle speaks for a publick spirit and temper, even so far as to assure us that we are not to seek only the satisfaction and ease of our own consciences, and to see that all we do be innocent and blameless; but that this care of our own souls should be managed after such a manner as to prevent the offence of others. So he writes to the Corinthians: *All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient; all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not*^r. As much as to say, I ought to forbear some things which are lawful, if they are inexpedient and contrary to the welfare of my neighbours: and he immediately subjoins, *Let no man seek his own, but every man another's welfare*^r. The question the apostle was deba-

^r 1 Cor. 10. 23.| ^r Ver. 24.

ting, was about eating things sacrificed to idols. Some christians, without any regard to the idols, could eat things sacrificed to them with a safe conscience, and without superstition: but because this was likely to be injurious to the tender consciences of other christians who were weak, as well as to confirm the heathens in their idolatry, the apostle advises them to avoid all occasion of scandal; and therefore says, *If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go, whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience-sake*; i. e. not asking whether it were offered to idols or not. *But if any man say unto you, this is offered in sacrifice to idols, eat not, for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience-sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof. Conscience I say, not thy own, but of the others*^s: i. e. "Thou art satisfied in thy
 " own conscience that thou mayst lawfully
 " eat without superstition: but have some
 " regard to the conscience of the others;
 " that is, of the weak christian, who thinks
 " this unlawful, and therefore is offended at
 " it; and of the zealous Jew, who will in-
 " terpret this liberty a compliance with ido-
 " latry, and so be scandalized at the christian
 " religion; and of the ignorant and super-
 " stitious Gentile, who seeing thee eat what
 " thou know'st was sacrificed to an idol,
 " imagines thou hast some respect to that

^s Ver. 27, 28, 29

" idol,

“ idol, and so is confirmed in his idolatry
 “ and superstition.” Therefore, adds the apostle, *Give no offence, neither to the Jews nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God. Even as I please all men in all things ; not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved*^t.

The apostle speaks after the same manner to the Romans : *We then that are strong, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves*^u ; i. e. not to seek our own ease and satisfaction only, but the good of others : *Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification*^v. And this he presses by the most glorious example of it that ever was in the world : *For even Christ, says he, pleased not himself ; but, as it is written, the reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me*^w. Christ pleased not himself, but exposed himself to all manner of afflictions and sufferings for the sake of others.

Therefore by the account you have now heard, from parallel places, the apostle in our text may be supposed to complain that there were many christians who had a greater regard to their own temporal interest, to their own reputation and honour, to their own ease and pleasure, than to the interest and honour of Christ and his church ; and many who sought only the improvement of their own minds, the liberty, satisfaction, and peace of their own consciences ; but did

^t Ver. 32, 33.

^u Rom. 15. 1.

^v Ver. 2.

^w Ver. 3.

not sufficiently regard the name and honour of our Lord Jesus, and the advancement of his interest and religion in the world ; whereas they ought to have been of the same generous spirit with the apostle Paul, and with Moses, who would have exposed themselves to suffer any thing which was possible for man to endure, for the advantage of the people of God and the glory of his name. For as Paul could even have wished himself anathematized, rather than his kindred and nation should perish in their infidelity and opposition to the christian religion ^x, of which he was so zealous a preacher ; so Moses speaks after the same manner concerning his life : *Blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written, if thou wilt forgive their sins* ^y. He would be cut off for the sake of his brethren : he sought not the interest of his own family and the honour of his name, but the glory of God and the good of his church : he would therefore rather *be blotted out of the book of life*, rather be cut off and lose the prospect of becoming a mighty nation, than the people under his charge should be cut off. *He sought not his own things*. And if we will rightly apply the expression, we must extend it not only to our persons and our families, but to the particular communities or societies to which we belong. As we are not especially to prefer our own personal advantage, our own tem-

^x Rom. 9. 3.| ^y Exod. 32. 32.

poral ease, honour and profit to the publick interest of religion ; so we are not so to seek the good of our own families as to neglect that which is of greater moment in itself, the good of the church of God, and the honour of the name of Christ : nor are we to consult the interest of one particular church or society of christians, so as to be negligent about the state of religion, and the honour and interest of Christ in other christian communities. Our Saviour hath taught us to call all men our neighbours ; and the christian religion teaches us to call all christians our brethren. Therefore lesser differences in regard to the sentiments of our minds will not discharge us from the obligations we are under, *to seek the things of Christ*, the interest of christianity and of christians in general. But,

2. Let us consider what the apostle means by *seeking our own things* in opposition to *the things of Christ*. The apostle does not hereby intend to hinder us from consulting our own true interest : that would have been unreasonable, and it would moreover have been vain. It would have been unreasonable ; for there is no man but from the principles of nature loves himself, and seeks his own interest : it would have been in vain ; because it is so natural and necessary to us, that it is impossible for us to divest ourselves of that principle which disposes us to seek our own profit and advantage. And the christian religion does not design, by commanding self-denial,

denial, to root this principle out of our minds, but to correct a disorderly self-love ; to regulate and govern us after such a manner, that as we seek ourselves regularly, so likewise we may be employed in seeking the interest of others ; that we may not only consult *our own things*, but *the things of others*, and especially the things of Christ, the things of the christian religion, which belong so much to the honour and glory of God. The law of God, as inforced by christianity, requires that we should *love our neighbour as ourselves*^z. It allows us therefore to love ourselves, and beyond all doubt it is our duty so to do ; but it must be with a regular love, consistent with love to our neighbour, and with the regard we owe to the honour of God.

The apostle's intention is not to deny us what we should eat and drink, and what we should put on, and what we should provide for our own families : for this he enjoined and commanded by authority from his great master, that *if any man would not work, neither should he eat*^a ; and declared, *If any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel*^b. “ He hath in effect “ denied christianity by so irregular a conversation ; for he hath renounced natural “ religion to that degree, that even infidels

^z Mat. 22. 39.

^a 2 Thef. 3. 10.

^b 1 Tim. 5. 8.

“ would scorn to be so negligent of a duty
 “ they owe to their families.” Religion does not hinder us from industry, but does encourage it: and we are to use all lawful endeavours to procure the things of human life, not only for ourselves, but for the sake of others; that we may be helpful to the poor in their necessities, and be serviceable to the common interest of religion. But when the apostle complained, *all sought their own and not the things of Jesus Christ*, it is certain he complained of those who so regarded *their own things, as to neglect the things of Jesus Christ*; so regarded their own reputation and honour, their own temporal interest and advantage, or the improvement of their own minds in knowledge and understanding, as to neglect the pursuit of those things which might tend to the common edification, to the glory of Christ and religion. For men to make themselves their only end, their last end, to seek only themselves; this is to renounce the honour and homage they owe to God, and the duty they owe to other men: this is to renounce the greatest part of the divine requirements; and is so far from tending to their own best advantage, that it is the way to destroy their temporal interest itself, as at long run will appear, how diligently soever it hath been consulted. To promote the interest of religion and the publick good, is certainly the best way to obtain temporal blessings.

The apostle blames those who seek only their own interest, not at all *the things of Christ*; or those who chiefly seek *their own things*, and prefer them to *the things of our Lord Jesus Christ*; who are eager and diligent, and industrious in pursuit of the things of this world, but are careless and negligent and cold, when they are to do any thing for the publick cause of religion and the service of Jesus Christ; who can project and contrive how they may advance their own families and promote their own interest, but have no thought or consideration, or if they have, it is but little, for the interest of Jesus Christ, and how religion may be promoted in the world. Those who inordinately pursue the things of this world, and neglect the publick interest of the church of Christ and the honour of his name, may very justly be said *to seek their own things, and not the things of Jesus Christ*. And the apostle complains of such as sought the one only and not the other; or sought their own interest chiefly, whereas they ought to have postpon'd this to the publick good and advantage. And this is not at all unreasonable; for while we seek the publick interest, we really advance our own after the most effectual manner. But I proceed,

II. To consider the causes of this great irregularity; and to inquire what are the things which so commonly dispose men, even
 2 christians,

christians, *to seek their own things, and not the things which are Jesus Christ's.*

I shall not undertake to enumerate them all; but shall speak of some of the main causes or occasions of mens consulting their own things in opposition to the things of Christ.

I. One grand cause of this evil, is conversing too much with earthly objects, and thereby suffering them to have too great an influence upon the heart. Earthly things have indeed this great advantage towards the gaining our affections, that they are near, that they are in possession, and are sensible; whereas the felicities of a future state, in the view whereof it becomes us *to seek the things of Jesus Christ*, are at a distance, are the objects of our faith and hope, and not in present possession. But it is very certain, that we act contrary to the rules and precepts of Christ's doctrine, as well as to the glorious views it sets before us, if we so converse with earthly objects, as to let them get the ascendant in our affections. When christians have not learned to *denn themselves^c*, to *put off the old man with his deeds^d*, and to *die to this world^e*; they soon dishonour the profession they make of the name of Christ: and tho they may seem to abandon the world, they will look back with regret upon it, and take occasion of declining into the paths of vice. *To love the things of this world*, is a very sad

^c Mark 8. 34.

^d Col. 3. 9.

^e Gal. 6. 14.

fig. *Love not the world, neither the things of the world; for he that loveth the world, the love of the Father is not in him*^f. If this prevail and obtain over his mind to a great degree, it will stifle the sentiments of religion, and make him neglect the things of Christ. A man who is eagerly set upon sensuality and covetousness, is thereby utterly indisposed for *seeking the things of Jesus Christ*. If he is a *lover of pleasure more than a lover of God*^g, how shall he heartily set about promoting the interests of God's kingdom among men? And as for covetousness, the apostle assures us, that *the love of money is the root of all evil*^h.

It was this, of which the apostle complained, when he said, *Demas hath forsaken us, having loved this present world*ⁱ: q. d. "He hath other things to mind now, and so disregards religion, and the interest and honour of the Lord Jesus Christ." It was covetousness which made Ananias, tho he would pretend to be serviceable to the publick, deny a part of that which he had offered to God, and professed he would bestow for carrying on the common cause. It was this which made him *lye to the holy Spirit*, when he was charged with the fact^k; and cost him his life, as an exemplary punishment. It was covetousness which made Simon Magus

^f 1 John 2. 15.

^g 2 Tim. 3. 4.

^h 1 Tim. 6. 10.

ⁱ 2 Tim. 4. 10.

^k Acts 5.

desirous of the gifts of the holy Spirit. He wanted to have the same power which the apostles had; *that on whomsoever he laid his hands, they might receive the holy Ghost*¹. And he would have given them money to obtain that of them, which he thought he could make money of again; and by which he supposed he should advance his own name and reputation. But what said the apostle? *Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter; for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity*^m.

How many good designs might be carried on for the interest of religion, if men had hearts like those of the primitive christians? I do not mean that christians now are required to put all into a common bank, as they did, for the promoting of the cause of Christ most advantageously in the primitive times; but if they had a temper and spirit any thing like theirs, how mightily would they be concerned for the advancement of truth and holiness in the world, and for the relief of the poor and distressed members of our Lord Jesus Christ? This narrowness of

¹ Acts 8. 19.| ^m Ver. 20—23.

spirit, I say, proceeds from covetousness and sensuality. Men are unwilling to part with that which furnishes them with the means of obtaining sensual pleasures, and promoting their own families; whereas they do not consider this is the way to *lay up treasure in heaven*ⁿ; this is the way to lay up blessings for their families, the much more effectual way to make a plentiful and lasting provision for them, than can be done by the most avaritious methods a covetous mind can contrive. Covetousness is, by the apostle, called *idolatry*^o; and when men *serve mammon*, it is no wonder that they forget God. *They cannot serve two masters*; if one be attended, the other must be neglected: as our Saviour says, *Ye cannot serve God and mammon*^p. If men are so devoted to themselves that they seek only to raise estates for themselves and their posterity, they must needs neglect the affairs of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the common interest of his church.

— This is so intolerable in ministers, that it is made one caution, when the qualifications of a minister are given in scripture, that whosoever is chosen to the office of an elder, must be one who is *not given to filthy lucre*^q, must be *a lover of hospitality*^r; otherwise instead of *adorning the doctrine of God his Saviour*^s, he would dishonour religion, and

ⁿ Mat. 6. 20.

^o Col. 3. 5.

^p Mat. 6. 24.

^q Tit. 1. 7.

^r Ver. 8.

^s Tit. 2. 10.

bring a discredit and disreputation upon the gospel which he preaches.

And as covetousness is contrary to that direction which is given for the choice of ministers; so likewise there is a multitude of passages in the new testament, which shew it must by no means be tolerated in the people. It is called *idolatry*^s. It is said of the covetous, *that they*, as well as others of an immoral behaviour, *shall not enter into the kingdom of God*^t. And we are assured, that when our Lord Jesus Christ comes to judgment, and to pass sentence upon the world, the vice against which he will shew his resentment in a peculiar manner, is this of covetousness. *I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink. I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall he answer them, saying; Verily I say unto you, in as much as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment*^u. Christ's poor are the members of his mystical body; and therefore he says, the things which were not done to them were not done to him. But,

2. Another cause of this narrowness of spirit, which is condemned by the apostle, is pride. Men who are self-conceited, who are proud of themselves and their own pretended

^s Col. 3. 5.

^t 1 Cor. 6. 10.

^u Mat. 25. 42—46.

abilities, are for indulging their own notions and projects, their own schemes and methods, after such a manner, that they would sacrifice the publick to their own private humours. Pride so much obtain'd, even in the times of the apostles, among the primitive christians, that it caused great factions and schisms amongst them: and in the church of Corinth particularly; *while one saith, I am of Paul; another, I am of Apollos*; the apostle justly asks them, *Are ye not carnal, and walk as men* ^v? They minded *their own things, and not the things of Christ*: and therefore the apostle thus reproves them; *Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified* ^w? &c. q. d. “ You should not set up one name or another name after such a manner, or be vainly conceited of yourselves, or of others, to whom you so strictly adhere, in opposition to the publick interest of Christ.”

3. Another cause of this evil is envy. Some persons are so weak and ill-natur'd, that they envy the gifts which God hath given to others; whereas they should rejoice that God hath endowed others with better gifts than themselves. *Moses wished that all the Lord's people were prophets* ^x; that they were all abundantly more useful and serviceable to the common interest of religion. What a poor and sordid spirit is it for men to envy others for the reputation they have in the church

^v 1 Cor. 3. 3, 4.

^w Chap. 1. 13.

^x Num. 11. 29.

of God ; for the endowments of their minds, and the talents they have gain'd ; or any advantage whereby they are rendered more serviceable than themselves? This is a vice attended with so much disgrace amongst men, that there is no man will acknowledge he hath it ; no man will confess that he is guilty of envy in the proper sense, and in the sense I am now speaking of. But alas ! tho it is so sordid and so odious, that there is no person so confident but he would be ashamed to own it ; yet it is a crime too frequently found among them who call themselves christians. A far different temper of mind prevailed in the apostle Paul, who rejoiced when Christ was preached. However, they who did it, laboured to discredit him, and endeavoured to support their own reputation upon the ruin of his ; yet still he *rejoiced if Christ were preached*^y, so that by their preaching any good was done in the world.

4. Another cause of this evil, is peevishness or ill temper. Some are naturally thus inclined, and have indulged themselves in an evil habit to that degree, that it is a hard matter to conquer what renders them so uneasy, and indeed intolerable to others. 'Tis certain, habits of this kind must proceed from ignorance, pride and self-conceit. And some there are so froward, that they can never be easy with any thing but what gratifies their

^y Phil. i. 18.

own inconstant and unaccountable humours. They are so morose and sour, so full of jealousies and suspicions, so apt to misinterpret things; that they are not only ready to entertain the most unkind opinion of others, but very often will endeavour to hinder the useful designs and valuable purposes of good men, by insinuating such jealousies into other peoples minds as they have form'd in their own. Thus did the Jews and the false teachers amongst the christians, insinuate things to the disadvantage of the apostle Paul, that they might lessen his authority and credit amongst the people; as appears by both the epistles to the Corinthians, and the epistle to the Galatians. There is such a frowardness of temper in some, that instead of putting their hands and shoulders to the same service and interest of religion with their christian brethren, they rather set themselves to oppose that which is good. This is by no means to be indulged by any: men ought to look narrowly into their own souls, and see from whence their suspicions arise; if from themselves, they ought to think it a great unhappiness, that, by their ill humour, they should obstruct any thing which may be for the publick good, the interest of religion, and the glory of Jesus Christ. When the people prophesied in the camp, *My Lord forbid them*², says Joshua to Moses. And the dis-

² Num. 11, 28.

ciples would have had those forbidden who performed miracles in the name of Christ; *because, say they, they follow not us^a*: they have not intirely embraced our principles, they seem to be another party of men; care should be taken to obstruct their proceedings; therefore *forbid them*. But both Moses and Christ speak after another manner: *Would to God all the Lord's people were prophets^b*, says Moses. *Forbid them not^c*, says Christ. As they preach some of the same truths, and advance the same common interest of religion with us; therefore they are to be indulged: and not only so, but they are to be cherished, seeing they promote the same good design.

5. Another reason of this narrowness of spirit, blamed by the apostle, is superstition and bigotry. Some persons are so superstitiously concerned about lesser matters of religion, that they do not seem to care much what becomes of things of greater importance. If *mint, anise and cummin be tithed^d*, as was the case of the Pharisees, tho' *the weightier matters of the law be neglected*, they are well enough contented. These are little narrow spirits; whose heads are so full of things of the smallest consequence, that they are incapable of entertaining any thing else. And as all their warmth in religion is spent about those things wherein differences may be easily borne; so they have

^a Mark 9. 38.^b Num. 11. 29.^c Mark 9. 39.^d Mat. 23. 23.

no zeal to spare for matters of the highest consequence. Such is their concern about their own sentiments, and some particular practices wherein they differ from other christians; that, to promote these things, they will even disregard religion in general, and abandon the common interest and advantage of the church of Christ. This is unbecoming the spirit of a christian. Were there not great differences among the professors of christianity in the apostles times? Yet the apostle Paul exhorts them that they should *bear one with another*^e; and take charitable methods to bring differing parties to unity. And indeed it must be charity, if any thing in the world, which must unite christians together, and unite them in the same sentiments. Ill treatment is never the way to divest men of their prejudices, but to increase them.

6. Another cause of this great mischief, that men promote *their own things* so much, *and not the things of Jesus Christ*, is laziness and pusillanimity. Too many are stupid and negligent in those things wherein they ought to be the most industrious. Some are mighty diligent in their own affairs, *can rise up early and sit up late, and eat the bread of sorrow*^f, to advance the interest of their families; but they are so unactive and stupid when any thing is proposed to them for the advance-

^e Col. 3. 13.| ^f Psal. 127. 2.

ment of the interest of Christ and religion, that they seem to have no heart, they know not how to go about it. To this I join pusillanimity, or timorousness in any thing wherein men think there will be some expence, or other difficulty. These are unwilling to serve the interest of Christ, and the common cause of religion, for fear of trouble and charge : as if we were born for ourselves alone, to seek our own ease and pleasure : as if it became christians patiently to see disorders multiply in the church of God, and not make use of their endeavours to rectify them ; or to see others concerned about that good work, and not to lend a helping hand to it. The apostle Paul was concerned at whatever befel the churches of Christ : *Who is weak*, says he, *and I am not weak ? who is offended, and I burn not ?* He carried the affairs of the people of God so much upon his heart, that he was continually concerned for them at the throne of grace in his prayers, and continually writing to them to know their affairs and welfare ; endeavouring to reclaim them from all their faults, and to instruct and edify them, that they might advance in divine knowledge, and *adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour*^h.

How unbecoming is it for ministers to be careless and negligent in the affairs of God's house, when its edification is their special

^e 2 Cor. 11. 29.

| ^h Tit. 2. 10.

employment; and it should be their chief concern, by all imaginable endeavours, to support the common interest of religion? They, in especial manner, are devoted to the service of Christ; therefore should *mind the things of Christ, and not their own*. And the people too, as they have professed themselves to be christians, and devoted themselves to Christ, they ought likewise to be active and zealous in his service. How many difficulties do some men form to themselves? Some say, *it is not yet time* to promote such and such a good work. But, *Is it time for you to abide in your cycled houses*, says the prophet, *and this house be waste^a?* So in the words of my text I may ask you; *Is it time for you to seek your own things, while the things of Christ are neglected?* The sluggard, and timorous person, when he is desired to be concerned in any good thing, will say with him in the Proverbs, *There is a lion in the way; I shall be slain in the streets^k*: I shall be exposed, shall blemish my reputation, shall draw upon myself some difficulty or other. This is very unbecoming christians. The apostle Paul was of another spirit; he was so far from indulging his own ease, that he was willing even to be sacrificed for the publick interest: *Yea*, says he, *if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all^l*.

^a Hag. 1. 4.^k Prov. 22. 13.^l Phil. 2. 17.

The apostle speaks these words as one who heartily believed the promises made to such as persevere in Christ's faithful service; and fortified himself against the views of suffering, with the firm expectation of their fulfilment.

'Tis the want of this which makes our resolutions fail: and 'tis certain there is a disbelief of Christ's promises attending all the other causes of mens *seeking their own things*, and *neglecting the things of Jesus Christ*. I might therefore insist upon this particularly under a distinct head: but having enlarged so much already, I forbear; and proceed,

III. To consider the reasons why we should *seek the things of Christ* rather than *our own*; and the unreasonableness of the contrary procedure.

I. It is evident that we ought *not to seek our own things*, but *the things of Christ* preferable to them; if we will grant that the things which are of themselves most excellent and of the highest consequence, ought to be preferred to those which are less excellent and of less importance. None will deny this proposition: and surely it ought to be no doubt with a christian, that *the things of Christ*, the honour of his name, the interest of religion, and the happiness of his church, are preferable to a man's private interest, and the interest of his family; that divine things are preferable to human things, our spiritual

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to our worldly advantage. Is it not reasonable that we should have regard to the honour of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is worthy of infinite glory and dignity, when it is so great a part of the business of the church above, as well as below, to ascribe glory and praise to his name, *who hath redeemed us by his blood*^m? Is not the interest of Christ the greatest and best end of all others? that which God prefers above all others? Should not this, therefore, be promoted and advanced by every one of us? Is not the promotion of religion in the world of the greatest importance, seeing the interest of so many souls is concerned therein? And should not we be lovers of souls, seeing God hath declared himself so to be? If the apostle could *wish himself anathematized* for the salvation of soulsⁿ, surely we ought to have a tender regard to the souls of men; and should, with the greatest readiness and application, seek the common interest of religion, that we might *save our ourselves, and others also*^o. Is it not the most noble and rational employment to mind the things of religion, those truths which are the highest improvement of our understandings when we know them, and the most proper to correct our evil habits; which render us conformable to the divine image, and adorn us with god-like graces and virtues?

^m Rev. 5. 9 — 14.

ⁿ Rom. 9. 3.

^o 1 Tim. 4. 16.

Should not these divine things, on our own account, be carefully minded? And if we should observe them for the interest of our own souls, then certainly for the souls of others too. Is it not reasonable that we should postpone the things of this world to those of another; and account the things of time, *what we shall eat, and what we shall drink, and what we shall put on^p*, less than the things of eternity; how our souls shall be fed with knowledge and understanding, and with the bread and water of life? Are ourselves and our families of such consequence, that, in providing for their temporal interest, which God hath allowed us, we should totally neglect the temporal and spiritual welfare and prosperity of so many others to whom we are allied in the bonds of christianity? Is it not worth our while to sacrifice our own honour and interest to the honour and interest of Jesus Christ, especially when we shall find it again with advantage in the other world? Is it so much to be regarded, whether we have abundance of ease and sensual pleasure, or whether the name of our Lord Jesus Christ be advanced, and the interest of many souls be provided for? Is there not a divine pleasure in consulting the publick interest and advantage, when we consider how reasonable it is on all accounts? Can we be easy, if, by the grace of God, we

^p Mat. 6. 31.

have been helped to correct the disorders of our own minds? Can we be easy when we find disorders in communities, which are formed for the honour of Christ and the good of souls, and not lay to heart these disorders, and endeavour to rectify them, if possible? Thus you see that nothing is more reasonable than that we should postpone our own private affairs to the publick interest of religion. And,

2. As the thing is reasonable in itself, so there is an obligation upon us in point of gratitude. We are ungrateful if we do not *seek the things of Jesus Christ in preference to our own*. Our Lord Jesus *pleased not himself*, sought not his own things, but sought our happiness; as the apostle observes, *Even Christ pleased not himself*^q. He sought our pleasure and advantage, how we might be freed from everlasting misery, and advanced to everlasting glory. *He became poor, that we, thro' his poverty, might be made rich*^r. He stripped himself of his honour, and veiled the glory of his divinity, by assuming our nature, and *taking upon him the form of a servant*^t, that he might consult our interest and promote our happiness, both in time and to eternity. And should not this stupendous grace stir up in our minds a grateful disposition to make him what returns we are capable of? Our Lord Jesus does not require

^q Rom. 15. 3.

^r 2 Cor. 8. 9.

^t Phil. 2. 7.

us to deny ourselves to such a degree as he was voluntarily pleased to deny himself; but it is altogether reasonable we should deny ourselves in some things for his interest, especially since our own truest and greatest advantage is so intimately united with it. And surely gratitude should oblige us: for our blessed Redeemer, when there was no necessity upon him to be concerned for us, tho he was invested with infinite dignity and majesty, assumed our nature, and was pleased to expose himself to the contumelious and painful death of the cross for our sakes. *He went about doing good* to others^s, but even forgot himself. When he was weary, and hungry and thirsty by the well of Samaria, no sooner was he denied a draught of water when he asked it of the woman there, but he forgot his own thirst, because he was desirous of the salvation of her soul; and spake to her of *the water of life*^t. His hearty and unwearied concern for the welfare of others, appears by the frequency and manner of his instructing his disciples, and weeping over their folly and unbelief. Indeed herein he imitated the goodness of God the Father, *who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all*^u. And shall we spare any thing that we can give to him? Certainly gratitude requires us, if God hath given us endowments of mind, knowledge

^s Acts 10. 38.^t John 4. 10.^u Rom. 8. 32.

and learning, that we should employ that knowledge, that learning, those abilities, of whatsoever kind, for his interest. If he hath given us estates and reputation in the world; those estates, at least a part of them, should be laid out for his service and glory; and that reputation should be employed to credit religion, and to advance the name of Christ: and when we have done all, we shall be but *unprofitable servants* ^v; we cannot compensate, by what we can do, what our Lord Jesus hath done for us. He hath sought to advance our pleasure and happiness, and hath taken effectual care to make our everlasting welfare secure: nay, he hath given us the promises of this life, so far as they are consistent with his honour and our spiritual good. He hath told us, if we *seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all other things shall be added to us* ^w. And the apostle says, *Godliness hath the promise of this life and of that which is to come* ^x. Does not gratitude oblige us to make returns? Have we a title to a crown of everlasting glory; is there durable riches and righteousness laid up for us; did Christ seek our interest so much, and provide for it so well; and shall we be careless and insensible about his? Shall we do nothing for him while we are in this world? What shame and confusion would this throw us into, if we looked well into our own minds,

^v Luke 17. 10.

^w Mat. 6. 33.

| ^x 1 Tim. 4. 8.

and examined what obligations of gratitude we are under, and how little we have answered them?

3. Not only are we obliged by gratitude, if we would act by that generous principle; but we are obliged by solemn covenant to our Lord Jesus Christ. He hath given himself for us and to us on his part; and we have devoted ourselves to him and his service on our part, if we are christians indeed: *We are not our own, but are bought with a price; and therefore ought to glorify God with our bodies and spirits, which are his*^y. Shall we seek *our own things*, to the prejudice of Christ and his honour, when we ourselves *are not our own*? We have given up ourselves to him; we are consecrated to his service: and it is sacrilege for us to go about to rob him of any thing that is his; to rob him of his honour, and the service that is due to him.

Ministers are under an especial obligation, as being peculiarly devoted to the service of God. Shall any of us be so fordid and base, and of so narrow and dishonourable principles, as to forget the interest of our Lord Jesus Christ, his honour, and his people? Shall we postpone his honour and interest to our own temporal advantage; and be seeking ourselves when we should be doing good to others, and to the interest of Christ to

^y 1 Cor. 6. 19, 20.

which we are devoted, and in which we are engaged to spend ourselves? On the contrary, whatsoever treatment we meet with, we should generously resolve, with the blessed apostle, that we will *labour more abundantly*: that we will never desist from our work, that we will never be terrified from doing that which is our duty, whatsoever be the consequence; *tho the more abundantly we love, the less we are beloved*²: considering that as it is our truest interest while we are here, so it is of the greatest importance to us to act in this manner, *that we may be able to give up our accounts with joy hereafter*³.

And this is not only the duty and interest of ministers, but of the people too: those who are truly christians, have devoted themselves to the honour and interest of Christ. *You are not your own*^b: if you have any gifts or talents, any abilities of mind which may be employed for the honour of religion; do you think that these must be expended only upon your families, and for obtaining a great establishment for them in the world; and that you are to project nothing, to design nothing, to spend no thoughts, no endeavours for the promotion of religion, and the honour of Christ in it? Do you think your estates are given you for yourselves only, or for your children? God requires you should pay him homage: it is all his; and you may

² 2 Cor. 12. 15.

³ Heb. 13. 17.

^b 1 Cor. 6. 19.

say, when you bring him the largest offerings, *Of thy own, O Lord, we offer unto thee*^c. Have you any thing but what is lent you? You are stewards, and God hath intrusted you with talents: he allows you a considerable part for your own use, and that of your families; and will you refuse to pay him the homage that he has reserved for himself? He puts it into your hands, that you may have the satisfaction of contributing something towards the honour of his name; and that you may have the god-like pleasure of relieving many in affliction and distress. And will you refuse yourselves this pleasure and satisfaction, this opportunity of pleasing God here, and of enhancing your reward in heaven? Consider how strong the obligations are upon you. Let us all seriously observe what engagements we are under. As we are entered into covenant with God, *we are not our own but his*; and must therefore glorify him in our bodies and spirits, which are his^d.

But in the last place, to add no more: Your own interest is concerned in this matter. This may seem a paradox; a man least seeks his own things in the best sense, when he seems to seek them most. When he neglects the interest of Christ, he little seeks his own interest: and when he looks after the interest of Christ, he most seeks his own. It is easy to make this out to you. For, what is our own

^c 1 Chron. 29. 14.| ^d 1 Cor. 6. 19, 20.

interest? Why, how we may have a conscience easy in this world, and how we may be happy for ever; how we may be formed after the image of God, and fitted for communion with him here and to all eternity. Is not the salvation of our souls a matter of the highest consequence; and is not the advancing our happiness and joy in heaven, a matter of greatest importance? Well then, if we abandon our *own things* after such a manner as to prefer to them *the things of Christ*; if we make religion our principal business, to promote it not only in our own souls, but as much as we can in the world; we may safely leave our own things to our Lord Jesus Christ. If we employ such a part of our time and talents for his service as becomes us, we shall lose nothing of our temporal interest thereby; but, on the other hand, advance it. God secured the possessions of the Israelites, when their males came up to Jerusalem to worship three times a-year; and promised them that the heathen *should not* so much as *desire their land* at those times*. If you will seek his interest and honour, your own affairs will not run back; your own interest will not be unprovided for. It is much better to have our affairs under the special and peculiar care and protection of God's providence; much better for us to intail a blessing upon our families, by doing what is suitable to the divine requirements, than if

* Exod. 34. 24.

we could leave them the greatest sums. We shall *lay up treasures in heaven*, if we employ our temporal riches to the honour of God and the interest of religion. We shall hereby secure our riches : and tho they are transitory things, tho they *take to themselves wings and fly away* in this world, and if they abide with us, we must leave them in a little time ; yet this is the sure way to turn earthly treasures into heavenly. And if we secure our estates in heaven, we shall be sure to find them there, with vast improvements, in the good consequences of such a conduct and management ; *we shall be rewarded at the resurrection of the just* ^f. Is not peace of conscience a great blessing ; and especially when we come to die ? But what a sad reflection will it be then, if we find we have been only *seeking our own things*, and to build up a family, and have been thoughtless of the interest of Jesus Christ ? Will this be a comfortable reflection, I say, in our conscience when we come to die ?

Oh how happy shall we be, who are ministers, if we can then speak as the apostle Paul did : *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day ; and not to me only, but unto them also that love his appearing* ^g. What mighty comfort will it give us

^f Luke 14. 14.

| ^g 2 Tim. 4. 7, 8.

to reflect upon ourselves, and say, "We have been guilty of no great hurt in the church?" whereas there wants something of a positive nature to comfort a man then. What good have we done? what disorders have we attempted to rectify? what credit have we brought to religion by our example? what poor have we relieved? what publick spirit and temper have we shewn for the honour of Christ, and the advancement of his interest? Whether ministers or people, we should consider this; whether our concern has been chiefly for our religion, or for the success of our temporal affairs, and the advancement of our families; for our spiritual interest here, and our eternal interest hereafter, or for the things of this world.

If we bestow a part of our estates for the service of God, and give him that which he requires of us, he says, *Prove me now if I will not pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it*^h. And men may very safely trust in the Almighty; for *all the promises of God are faithful and true*. But who is there that hath piety enough to trust God? *Honour the Lord with thy substance*, says the wise man, *and with the first-fruits of thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine*ⁱ. But who will believe this? Tho we were continually meeting with troubles

^h Mal. 3. 10.| ⁱ Prov. 3. 9, 10.

and afflictions, poverty, sorrow and contempt in this world ; yet if we did but mind the interest of Christ and religion, our own everlasting advantage would be hereby consulted by us ; and our Lord Jesus Christ will know such at his coming, and he will acknowledge them when he appears. *Come, ye blessed of my Father. I was an hungred, and ye fed me*^k, &c. — “ You sought the things of Christ, my affairs, my concerns ; you relieved the members of my mystical body, advanced the interest of my church and kingdom. *Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you. Well done, good and faithful servants ; enter ye into the joy of your Lord.*” *Well done, good and faithful servants!* How happy to be thus commended and approved by our Lord Jesus Christ at his appearing ! How happy to be found without shame, and with confidence before him at his coming ! It is true, no good thing which we can do by the grace of God, can be meritorious in us ; we must disclaim all things of this kind : for *we are unprofitable servants*^l, and never do more than we ought to do ; nay, indeed, never do so much. However, to encourage our obedience, there is such a reward proposed to us.

Shall not these considerations then engage us all to divest ourselves of all narrow and

^k Mat. 25.

| ^l Luke 17. 10.

flavish principles? Shall not what hath been said inspire us with noble and generous dispositions, answerable to the obligations our holy religion lays upon us? Shall not reason, gratitude, and our own solemn promises and covenants, wherein we are engaged to God, oblige us to deny ourselves, *not to seek our own things, but the profit of others*, and the honour of our Lord Jesus Christ? Let us, according to these principles, and the glorious ends we have in view, behave ourselves as becomes us.

And upon this occasion of our assembling together, let me recommend to you, my brethren, and fellow-labourers in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, that you shew an eminent example on this account. It behoves us certainly, who are consecrated to the service of God, to be examples to those who are under our care and charge: it behoves us, on all occasions, to shew this generosity of mind, and to imitate the pattern of our Lord and his apostles, and the primitive christians; that we bring no disgrace upon our function. It would be a sad thing, if it should be justly complained of us, as in our text, *All seek their own things, not the things which are Jesus Christ's*. Far be it from us: I believe better things concerning you; and that you have a greater regard to the interest of our Lord Jesus Christ, than to your own private advantage. Let us shew it on all occasions:
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and let us be examples of humility, peace and concord ; examples of moderation and charity. Let us be first in every good work, and do what we can to advance the interest of God and religion.

And you, my brethren, who are not employed so strictly and immediately in the service of God, who are not devoted to his work in the same manner those are who minister in his name ; do you consider that christians are called in scripture *a kingdom of priests* ^m : they are all consecrated to God, and may all do considerable service to his interest. You may all teach by your conversations, by your advice and counsels, by your estates, and by all the advantages which God hath given you. You are to promote the common interest of religion, and to shew yourselves like-minded to Christ Jesus. *Let the same mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus* ⁿ ; as the apostle exhorts in this chapter wherein is our text. And let me conclude this discourse with another passage of his in the same epistle : *Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure ; whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report ; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things : those things which you have both learned, and received, and heard,*

^m Rev. 5. 10.

| ⁿ Phil. 2. 5.

and seen in me, do ; and the God of peace shall be with you °. Let us all, both ministers and people, be found doing after the same manner ; and then God will be with us.

° Phil. 4. 8, 9.



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S E R M O N II.

Preach'd before the

SOCIETIES for reformation of manners,
at *Salter's-Hall*, June 26, 1710.

PROV. xiv. 34.

*Righteousness exalteth a nation : but sin is
a reproach to any people.*



AS the practice of religion and virtue is the interest of every man, considered in his private capacity ; so it tends to the happiness of communities, and recommends itself to human society by the great advantages it brings to those who entertain and cultivate it : whereas vice and profaneness not only bring misery on particular persons ; but sooner or later subvert and ruin those nations and kingdoms wherein they are countenanced and indulged.

This is what the wisest of men, and one of the greatest of princes, teaches us in the words of our text : which contains a fundamental

mental maxim of state, worthy the regard of the best politicians, and indeed of all who wish well to mankind; since it informs us what it is that most certainly raises, and what most effectually degrades and destroys any nation or people in the world. *Righteousness exalteth a nation, &c.*

Tho *righteousness*, in the holy scripture, sometimes signifies liberality and charity; and therefore the psalmist, in giving the character of a charitable man, says, *He hath dispersed abroad, and given to the poor; his righteousness endureth for ever*^p: yet in this place it seems necessary to take it either strictly for *justice and equity*, or for *virtue and holiness* in general.

If it be taken for *justice*, the observation of Solomon is very good, that the regular administration of justice in magistrates, and just and honest dealings among the people, are a great honour and support to any community: and that injustice and corruption, fraud and violence, are very reproachful and scandalous, and tend to the discredit of any government where they obtain, and at length prove destructive of human society.

What gives some countenance to this interpretation, is, that in the other member of this sentence, a word is used in the Hebrew, which often signifies *mercy*^q, and is frequently coupled with *justice*, both of them com-

^p Psal. 112. 9.

| ^q רחם.

prizing all the duties of the second table of the law. *What doth the Lord require of thee,* says the prophet Micah, *but to do justly, and to love mercy* ^r? &c. And the psalmist, describing the prosperous state of the Jews, and perhaps ultimately that of the kingdom of the Messiah, says, *Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other* ^f. And Solomon himself connects these in this book of Proverbs, when he says, *He that follows after righteousness and mercy, finds life, righteousness and honour* ^g.

Now according to this account, the wise man may be understood to recommend mercy as well as justice in the text; since these, when well tempered, and seasonably dispensed, are the chief bonds and ligaments of society, and the very basis and strength of government: therefore he elsewhere says, *Mercy and truth preserve the king; and his throne is upholden by mercy* ^t.

But then instead of *sin is a reproach to any people*, we must read, mercy is a *reconciliation* to the people, or an *expiation* for the people: which the original will very well bear, since the word is elsewhere used in that sense ^u.

Not that we are to suppose that the exercise of mercy, clemency and charity on just occasions, can expiate the guilt either of

^r Mic. 6. 8.

^f Psal. 85. 10.

^g Prov. 21. 21.

^t Prov. 20. 28.

^u Exod. 29. 14. Lev. 4. 3.

magistrates or private persons, so as to justify them before God. But this is a figurative term, design'd to express either the good effects of mercy in a government, in appeasing the rage of popular tumults, and reconciling different parties, so as to make them conspire to promote the good of the publick; and is as much as to say, *Mercy appeases and reconciles the people*. Or else it may denote how very acceptable charity and mercy are to God, in so much that he prefers them to sacrifice: and so the words may be rendered, *Mercy is as a sin-offering for the people*. For thus a sort of atonement may be said to be made for national guilt, so as to prevent a national punishment. To this purpose the prophet Daniel advises the king of Babylon to reform his government: *Break off thy sins by righteousness, and thy iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthning of thy tranquillity*^v: which the Septuagint renders, *Pay a ransom for thy sins, by shewing mercy*^w, &c. And Solomon says, *By mercy and truth iniquity is purged*^x. And thus Phineas is said, by an act of justice, to have *made an atonement for the children of Israel*^y.

Another way of rendering the words is thus; *But mercy is sin to any people*: that is, 'tis an occasion of sin to a nation; and so

^v Dan. 4. 27.

^w τὰς ἀμαρτίας σου ἐν ἐλεημοσύναις λύτρωσαι, &c.

^x Prov. 16. 6.

^y Num. 25. 13.

must be understood of that undue and unseasonable exercise of mercy and lenity which proves an obstruction to justice; or is such a relaxation of it as is inconsistent with the publick good, in that it gives encouragement to vice. For the wise man tells us, *Because sentence against an evil work is not speedily executed, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil*².

But if *righteousness*, in the text, may be taken in a larger sense, viz. for religion and virtue in general, as it commonly is in the sacred writings; then the latter part of the verse must be understood according to our translation, and sets vice in a just opposition to virtue: *But sin is a reproach*, &c. This sense is chosen by divers interpreters, and the original will very well allow it: for the same word which is here translated *reproach*, is used concerning incestuous marriage, *Lev. 20. 17.* and rendered in our version *a wicked thing*^a; but by others a reproachful or shameful thing.

In this sense I chuse to take the words, because it seems to me the most natural; tho the other interpretations are not to be contemned, and might be well accommodated to the occasion of this discourse.

When the wise man says, *Righteousness exalteth a nation*, he may be fairly understood to mean that it advances its dignity and

² Eccles. 8. 11.

^a דָּוָר הָוֵא opprobrium hoc.

prosperity ; as he elsewhere says of wisdom, by which he generally means religion and virtue : *Exalt her, and she shall promote thee ; she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her* ^b.

Some render it, *Righteousness protects a nation* ; and the word in the text is used to a like purpose in the psalms : *He delivereth me from my enemies ; yea, thou liftest me up above those that rise up against me* ^c : i. e. thou defendest me, and givest me victory over them. According to this, it signifies that righteousness is a defence to a nation, and renders it successful against its enemies ; which is agreeable to that passage in the book of Job : *When men are cast down, then thou shalt say, There is lifting up.—He shall deliver the island of the innocent ; and it is delivered by the pureness of thy hands* ^d.

And, on the contrary, *sin is a reproach to any people* ; or, as the Septuagint and Syriac versions will have it, *sin diminishes or lessens a people* : which diminution may extend to their honour, wealth and power.

The sum of the matter is, that the practice of virtue and religion raises a nation to great prosperity at home, and gives it great credit and reputation abroad ; causes it to be respected by its neighbours and allies, and renders it formidable to its enemies : whereas vice and profaneness reduce a people to a

^b Prov. 4. 8.

^c Psal. 18. 48.

^d Job 22. 29, 30.

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weak and miserable condition ; so that they become mean and inconsiderable in the account of foreigners, and prove the scorn and contempt of their enemies.

That *righteousness* thus *exalts*, and *sin* thus *depresses a nation* ; I shall endeavour more particularly to make appear,

- I. From the reason of the thing itself, in the ordinary course of nature.
- II. From the justice of the divine providence, in the government of the world.
- III. From the declarations of the word of God.
- IV. From the observation and experience of mankind in the various ages of the world.

I. From the reason of the thing itself, in the ordinary course of nature.

And here we are to consider, on the one hand, what it is which can render a nation truly great and happy ; and, on the other, how necessary religion and virtue are to its welfare ; and how opposite vice and irreligion are to its felicity.

Every one will acknowledge that wisdom and prudence are requisite to the well-being of a nation ; and that these qualifications are so much the more necessary, in that they are of the last importance to those who are intrusted with the administration of publick affairs. Add to this, that the improvement

of knowledge, and the encouragement of all useful arts and sciences, conduce much to the prosperity of any people. This is often inculcated by the wise man, who represents wisdom, saying; *I wisdom dwell with prudence, and find out the knowledge of witty inventions^e. Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom: I am understanding; I have strength. By me kings reign, and princes decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles; even all the judges of the earth^f. And again: Wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence; but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom gives life to them that have it^g. This makes men understand righteousness, and judgment and equity; yea, every good path^h. This, he says, is better than strengthⁱ. Wisdom strengthens the wise more than ten mighty men which are in the city^k.*

Now as the practice of virtue and religion is the greatest instance of true wisdom and knowledge, both in magistrates and people; so it directly tends to improve and cultivate the minds of men, by giving them just notions of good and evil, of right and wrong, of honour and shame; and prompts them to aspire after intellectual accomplishments, as amiable in their own nature, and of the utmost consequence to make them safe and happy in society, and serviceable to the pub-

^e Prov. 8. 12.

^f Ver. 14, 15, 16.

^g Eccl. 7. 12.

^h Prov. 2. 9.

ⁱ Eccl. 9, 16.

^k Eccl. 7, 19.

lick. This makes them disdain to debase their noblest faculties, and abuse their best talents in the eager pursuit of sensual pleasures, and in the vile servitude of sin. This makes them frugal of their time, and ready to embrace all opportunities, and other advantages, for the improvement of their minds; not only for the sake of those refin'd pleasures themselves may expect to reap from such generous exercises, but also that they may hereby qualify themselves for the service of the community in which they live.

Whereas vice weakens and enervates the faculties of the soul, spreads a veil on the understanding, fills the heads of men with vain and foolish notions, and unreasonable prejudices; which appear in many sad instances in the conduct of their lives, as well to their own damage as that of the publick. This wastes their time, renders them slothful and negligent, and so incapable of that vigorous pursuit of wisdom and knowledge, that application and diligence, which the wise man expresses, by *searching for it as for silver, and digging for it as for hid treasure*¹. And while they are continually projecting what methods are to be taken for the gratification of their corrupt appetites, and *making provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof*; they often neglect what is necessary to accomplish them for doing their country any

¹ Prov. 2. 4.

eminent service. So that 'tis plain that virtue tends to advance a nation in wisdom and knowledge, in arts and learning ; and vice tends to introduce ignorance and barbarity, to make a people dull and insipid, and magistrates weak and incompetent to discharge the great trust reposed in them for the common welfare.

2. As the improvement of mens minds in wisdom and knowledge tends to the happiness of a community ; so a healthful and vigorous constitution of body is no inconsiderable advantage to the inhabitants of any nation. For this makes men capable of undergoing the necessary labours of human life, whether in a publick or private station ; whether in an industrious research of knowledge and wisdom, or in the exercise and improvement of these for the publick good. This is not only a great advantage to those who are employed in manuring the ground, and in manufacturing the produce of it ; but in the management of domestick trade and foreign commerce. This tends to make men follow their employments vigorously in time of peace, and fits them for the sometimes necessary toils and fatigues of war.

I am not now considering the pleasure of health, and the advantages of a vigorous constitution to the particular persons who enjoy it ; but how very useful 'tis to the civil society, that the members of it should be strong and healthful.

Now

Now 'tis virtue which procures this part of happiness, in the natural course of things. None can be ignorant how much sobriety and temperance tend to preserve and promote our health ; and how valuable a blessing this is to any nation who possess it in an eminent degree, not only on their own account, but on the account of their posterity, to whom it is ordinarily derived. Whereas luxury, intemperance, and leudness, soon waste the most vigorous constitution, and have a long train of diseases attending them : and the distempers, contracted by the vices of parents, frequently descend to their children, and transmit their bad effects to more than one generation.

And as there is a strict communication between the body and the soul, the infirmities of the one strangely affect the other ; and a race of men, who have sacrificed their health and strength to their vices, are commonly found to have weak and timorous minds ; and their sensuality and sloth often render them not only unactive and unwilling to attempt, but incapable to execute any great and noble design with resolution and courage, industry and application. So that such men frequently prove rather a burden than a support to society ; and sometimes appear more fit for hospitals than for the service of their country, either in the court, the city, or the camp.

And

And if the vices of mens souls are propagated, as well as the diseases of their bodies, by the criminal indulgence or connivance of the civil magistrate ; how strangely must the contagion be supposed to spread, and the mischief multiply itself in the succession of two or three generations ! How weak and languid would such a nation become, and how liable to the insults of the next aggressor !

3. Plenty and riches in like manner are justly accounted in the number of publick blessings. These are certainly a great defence to a nation : these are the happy fruits of peace, which both alleviate and reward the care and toil of human life ; and render a nation capable of sustaining the extraordinary expences of war, when that becomes necessary for its defence. These, wisely improved, encourage art and industry, promote trade and commerce, and give a nation weight and reputation in foreign countries. These furnish us with means of relieving the poor at home, by liberal contributions and charitable endowments ; and of succouring the distressed abroad, by a generous beneficence, not to be confined by any other bounds than those of the world.

But these are very much owing to the practice of virtue ; since 'tis this which makes men prudent in the management of their affairs, industrious in the improvement of useful arts and commerce, frugal in their expences,

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pences, provident for their families, and generous in their distributions for the common good : all which tend to gain men credit and esteem in the world, enlarge their interest and power, and thereby give fresh opportunities of enlarging their estates.

Religion and virtue teach men how to use the world so as not to abuse it ; and oblige them to manage their affairs with such justice and honesty as procures them reputation and applause, friendship and credit, and often furnishes them with means of rising in the world, and acquiring wealth : while the men of artifice and fraud, who give themselves liberty to practise the hidden things of dishonesty, are frequently detected and disgraced, suspected and avoided ; and at length inherit shame and poverty, as the reward of their unrighteous deeds.

In like manner, the voluptuous man wastes his substance in riotous living, and is dissolved in luxury and ease, instead of using industry and diligence for the preservation and increase of his substance. His mind is so dissipated or stupified by the pleasures of sense, that he becomes negligent and careless of his own domestick affairs, as well as of the welfare and prosperity of his country.

Sometimes indeed even vicious men appear generous and liberal ; but then their beneficence is often misapplied, and rarely managed with discretion. And the far greatest part of them sacrifice so much to their
vices,

vices, that they deprive both their own families and the publick of the benefits which might otherwise be expected from them.

4. Again: Honour and reputation are as necessary to the good of a community, as to that of the individuals which compose it. This makes a nation considerable to its friends and allies, and consequently terrible to its enemies.

Now 'tis plain, since virtue advances a people in wisdom and knowledge, gives health and vigor both to their bodies and minds, and improves their substance; it must, in consequence of these, give them honour and reputation in the world. It cannot but raise their credit in foreign countries, which will court their alliance and friendship, in proportion to their wisdom and opulency, grandeur and strength. While on the other hand, the vices which render a people lazy and negligent, rude and ignorant, soft and effeminate, weak and cowardly, poor and indigent, will make them contemptible to neighbouring states, and a derision to their enemies; so that their friendship and their enmity will be equally despised.

5. The security of all those blessings, which have been mentioned before, is of the highest consequence to a nation's happiness. For if mens liberty and property are precarious and subject to the capricious humour of a tyrant, and his slavish flatterers; how
can

can any of the comforts of life be truly relished? How little encouragement has a man to increase his knowledge, who is likely by this only to increase his sorrow; while his abilities are either in a great measure useless to the publick, or render him suspected, and expose him to the utmost hazard, unless he can allow himself to prostitute them, to serve the designs of arbitrary power? What taste of health and strength can a generous man be supposed to have when his country is enslaved, and himself involved in the common calamity, and deprived of liberty, which he counts preferable to life itself? Or what fruit of his industry and care can he promise himself, whose estate and life lie at the mercy of cruel and unreasonable men; or whose country is weak, defenseless, and an easy prey to foreign invaders? So that the security of our liberty is of the last importance to the welfare and prosperity of a nation.

'Tis liberty which inspires men with generous designs and resolutions for the common benefit, and makes them diligent in the execution of them. This makes them assiduous, and provident in the management both of their own affairs and those of the publick; having a just expectation of receiving the reward of their labours, of enjoying the fruit of them themselves, and of transmitting a due share of it safely to their posterity. This teaches princes and magistrates

gistrates to rule with justice and clemency, as the common parents of their country, and subjects to obey and support their government with good-will and alacrity; and to oppose invaders with courage and bravery.

Now religion and virtue tend to secure to a people their just liberty. These inspire men with true and reasonable notions of the rights of mankind, and the good design of government; and give them becoming sentiments of the duties of every relation in which men can stand one toward another; and instruct them how to behave themselves both to their governors and their fellow-subjects. These teach them to value liberty, not only for their own sake, but from a tender regard to their country and posterity; and consequently to do all that becomes them in the defence of it. Their knowledge, their honour, their courage and vigour, their fidelity and charity to men, their piety and gratitude to God, all conspire to kindle in their breasts a noble zeal for the common rights of mankind; and enlarges their souls to seek the happiness and good of all men as much as lies in their power.

But vice is destructive of the liberty of men, in that it renders them supine and negligent of their common rights, especially when those, who design to violate them, amuse and flatter them, by indulging them in a licentious course of life; so that what the prophet

prophet says of wine, *that it takes away the heart* ^m, may justly be said of vice in general. It takes away the true sense of honour and liberty, and makes men forget their own interest: it lessens their affection to the proper objects of it; and sometimes alienates their minds from their country and their posterity. It reduces them to necessitous circumstances, and then tempts them to use mean and fordid methods for their preferment, that they may the better support their extravagant expences; and so they sacrifice their country in the flames of their lust.

And if they retain some small remains of good-nature and compassion for others, and seem to have some sense of honour and relish of liberty left; what poor efforts are they likely to make in defence of it, who have weakened both their bodies and minds, exhausted their estates, and forfeited their reputation by a dissolute course of life?

How unlikely are such men to act the part of wise and generous patriots! Or if they engage in any noble enterprize for the security or recovery of their liberty, how unlikely are they to succeed! In a time of great exigency, as that of a foreign invasion, for instance; a nation would be in a very dangerous condition, that should have no better defence than such as these could make.

^m Hos. 4. 11.

Moreover ; if the liberty of a nation could be preserved from the danger of a foreign invasion, without the restraint and suppression of vice, and the practice and encouragement of virtue ; it could scarce long subsist, but would sink with its own weight.

For whereas religion and virtue secure all that is dear to us in the world, by impressing the minds of men with an awful regard to the sacred obligation of an oath, without which the lives, liberties and estates of innocent men would be exposed to perpetual danger ; irreligion and profaneness tend to weaken and dissolve this great bond of society : for it may be justly feared, that those who make so free with the name of God as to swear profanely for their diversion, will in time take the liberty of swearing falsely against men, when they have a probable prospect of doing it with impunity ; I mean with impunity in this world, by escaping the censure of the civil magistrate.

Again : Religion and virtue make men faithful to their charge, and fit them to serve their country in those publick posts, which are a great trust on the one hand, and liable to great temptations on the other. Religion teaches private men to be just and honest in their commerce ; to do to others as they would have others do to them ; to be courteous and civil to each other ; *to give honour to whom honour is due* ; to pay due respect to their superiors ; and to be charitable and
com-

compassionate to the poor and miserable : which becoming behaviour to all ranks and degrees of men, mightily tends to the support and happiness of the community. Vice and irreligion, on the contrary, render men false and treacherous, ungrateful, covetous and unjust, passionate and ill-natur'd, cruel and revengeful : all which have a natural tendency to break the most sacred ties of human society ; and, when they grow common, produce jealousies and suspicions, civil discord, hatred and malice, spoil and rapine, confusion, and *every evil work* ; and will at length bring not only the utmost infamy, but ruin on a nation.

II. This will farther appear from the justice of the divine providence in the government of the world.

For since communities of men, as such, are rewarded or punished only in this world, the future judgment being that of particular persons only ; 'tis the course and method of providence, to reward in this life those cities and nations which encourage and promote religion and virtue, and discourage vice and irreligion : to reward them, I say, with temporal blessings, with peace and plenty, health and long life, success and victory.

Nay, when they have provoked God by their sins ; if, upon the warnings of his providence, or the admonitions of his word, they seriously repent and reform, he is wont to

avert the judgments impending, and to remove the calamities by which he has chastised them.

This, I say, seems to be the constant course of the divine providence towards nations and kingdoms: and tho particular persons sometimes prosper in a sinful course, this is no just reflection on the providence of God; because the judgment of particular persons is chiefly reserved to another world, to that day when *the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed, and every man rewarded according to his works*. And yet God has not left himself without witness of his great abhorrence of sin, and his just resentment of the insolence of some bold sinners, who have distinguished themselves from the common herd by the great enormity of their crimes, in inflicting some remarkable punishment on them in this world, that others might hear and fear, and do no more so wickedly.

But when cities or nations sin with a high hand, and refuse to be reform'd, especially after a long exercise of God's patience, and the repeated threatnings or warnings he has used to reclaim them; he pours forth his wrath upon them in some extraordinary judgments, that such national calamities may make a deep impression on some persons at least, to bring them to repentance, and to prevent others from committing the like abominations; to restrain men by motives, taken from their temporal interest; and

to excite magistrates to the faithful and sedulous discharge of their duty, in punishing vice and profaneness; since this is necessary to their own safety, and that of the people under their government, who otherwise must expect to feel the weight of the divine displeasure in the common ruin.

This wise method, used by the supreme Governor of the world, gives some check to the fury and madness even of those sinners who look no farther than the present life. Those who are not to be moved by the representation of a future judgment, are touched with the near prospect of approaching misery in this life; and from the observation they may easily make of this usual method of providence to inflict national punishments for national sins, are under such apprehensions as curb their exorbitant vices, lest they should be deprived of all that is dear to them in this world, in which only they have hope.

And without such instances of the divine severity, the combinations of the wicked would grow so numerous and formidable, that it would be impossible for the righteous to subsist among them; nay, all civil societies would fall into the utmost confusion and disorder, and the wicked would themselves destroy one another. God therefore dispenses his judgments in the earth, that the inhabitants of the world may learn righteousness; at least to have so much regard to

moral virtues, as are necessary to the very being of human society.

III. This is also plain from the express declarations of the word of God. *At what instant*, says the Almighty, *I speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if the nation against whom I have pronounced turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them* ⁿ.

Thus God set good and evil, life and death, blessings and curses before the nation of Israel, with the most solemn declarations, that that people should be rewarded or punished in this world, according to their virtuous or criminal behaviour; as the holy scripture abundantly testifies. But this is so well known, that I need not cite a great number of particular passages ^o.

'Tis no less evident that the prophets frequently denounced terrible judgments on other cities and nations when their crimes were heinous, and the cry of them reached to heaven, and were so provoking, that it was necessary the great Judge of the universe

ⁿ Jer. 18. 7—10.

| ^o See Deut. 28. and ch. 32.

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should assert his authority and vindicate his justice, in making them publick examples, to warn other cities and nations by their fall.

IV. This is confirmed by the observation and experience of mankind in the various ages of the world.

The destruction of the old world by an universal deluge ; the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, and those other cities of the plain by fire from heaven ; the extirpation of the Canaanitish nations, when their iniquities were full ; the subversion of the greatest monarchies and states, of the most powerful nations and cities of the world ; are all dreadful instances of the truth we have been confirming.

The desolation, misery and slaughter which has befallen so many nations by fire and sword, by famine and pestilence, by earthquakes and inundations, with which all history abounds ; sufficiently prove how terrible it is for any community *to fall into the hands of the living God*, when they have highly provoked the eyes of his glory, and abused his long-suffering and patience by their repeated crimes.

In what a flourishing state was the Jewish nation while they worshipped the true God, and obeyed his righteous laws ! they enjoyed peace and prosperity, wealth and honour ; they were the envy of their neighbours, and

the terror of their enemies : they were the peculiar care of providence ; successful in their enterprizes, and victorious in war.

But when they degenerated, and the magistrates conniv'd at a general depravation of their manners, and were guilty of the like crimes themselves ; when that nation became impious and unjust, cruel and uncharitable, intemperate and lascivious, what judgments and calamities did not befall them ?

And when to the rest of their crimes they added that of infidelity, under extraordinary means of conviction, and to fill up the measure of their iniquity, *crucified the Lord of life and glory*, against the clearest proofs of his divine mission ; that unhappy people were punished to so great a degree, and by so great a variety of plagues, that the apostle might well say, *wrath was come upon them to the uttermost* ^p. And as the miserable remains of that sinful nation have been for many generations scattered on the face of the whole earth ; they are a lasting and astonishing monument of the divine vengeance, to warn the other nations of the world.

I may add to all that has been said, that the most excellent means to induce men to the practice of religion and virtue, *viz.* God's sacred word and ordinances, have been judicially taken away from many cities and countries which had long abused them ; and the grossest ignorance and errors now reign

in many places of the world, where the gospel of our Redeemer once flourished: for the divine justice adjusts and proportions the punishment of communities to the nature and degree of their crimes; and when the gospel of his kingdom has been long despised and abused, he at length transports that inestimable treasure to some other city or nation, where that blessing may be better improved: and this spiritual judgment is often attended with the greatest of temporal calamities.

And even in heathen nations 'tis well known, that arts and learning have best flourished under a strict and virtuous discipline; that this promoted the health and vigor of their bodies, gave them wealth and honour, and secured their liberty at home, as well as made them victorious abroad. From how small a beginning have some states been raised to a very high pitch of dignity and power, while those social virtues, which naturally tend to the welfare and prosperity of communities, were practised and encouraged among them! But those very nations, that have been so famous in history on this account, have, by indulging vice and profaneness, at length become contemptible for their ignorance and barbarity, for their weakness and effeminacy, for the baseness and meanness of their spirits, as well as for their poverty. The strange alteration which Greece and Rome received on this account, are very remarkable instances of the truth of the wise

man's observation in our text, that *righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.*

Having thus shewn you from the reason of the thing itself in the ordinary course of nature ; from the justice of the divine providence in the government of the world ; from the declarations of the word of God ; and from the observation and experience of mankind in the various ages of the world, that *righteousness thus exalts, and sin thus depresses a nation* : it remains that I close what I have said with a few words of application.

And certainly if virtue conduces so much to the happiness of a nation, it teaches us how much it must redound to the benefit of particular persons : it shews us of how great use and advantage good men are to a society ; how prudent it is to encourage them, and how impolitick as well as unjust it is to persecute them. It farther teaches us how much it becomes magistrates to promote virtue and punish vice ; and by their example, as well as their authority, to reform those under their care ; and how much it becomes the ministers of the gospel to concur with them in so good a design ; yea, how readily all good men should assist in this case. God requires all to improve the talents he gives them : and all may assist one way or other in this good work of reformation ; either by their authority, their interest and reputation ;

tion ; by their estates, their time, or their advice ; or however by their example.

There are many, I am sensible, who have such a love to righteousness and virtue, such a regard to the glory of God, and the prosperity of their country, as engages their good wishes for the success of the design : but they are intimidated from lending a publick hand to so good a work, from the prospect of the many difficulties and discouragements which attend it. But let them consider the work is glorious in itself, 'tis necessary, and of the utmost consequence ; 'tis a work of justice, piety and charity ; charity of the most extensive nature, to the souls as well as bodies of men ; to friends and enemies ; to particular persons and societies ; to those of the present time, and to future generations. The best and noblest undertakings have met with opposition ; but the glory of the work is still increased, in proportion to the discouragements which are undergone, and the difficulties which are surmounted.

Farther ; let those who are engaged in this good service, consider that dreadful consequences must follow the desertion of it. Let them encourage themselves with remembering that they have authority on their side ; the prayers of good men are for them, and God will be with them. Dangers indeed they must undergo ; but few in this service have resisted unto blood. And methinks good men should be greatly animated to so useful

a work, in the midst of all the dangers which attend it, when they observe that men daily run far greater hazards to obtain honour and wealth in this world, and to gratify their sensual and vicious appetites. Immorality is indeed at a great height, and he who engages in the work of reformation, is sure to meet with violent opposition ; but the more furiously on this occasion Satan rages, the greater reason we have to believe *his time is but short* ¹.

To conclude : it is matter of great encouragement to those who are concerned in this pious and generous undertaking, that in the midst of all these difficulties they have met with such considerable success. And what should most of all encourage them, is, that they may assure themselves that the reward they shall receive, will be proportionate to the nature and difficulties of the service.

¹ Rev. 12. 12.



S.E.R.



S E R M O N III.

Preach'd at the

Ordination of the Rev^d. Mr. *David Rees*,
and two deacons ; in a church of Christ
at *Limehouse*, Feb. 19, 1705-6.

TITUS i. 5.

*For this cause left I thee in Crete, that
thou shouldest set in order the things that
are wanting, and ordain elders in every
city, as I had appointed thee.*

WE are told by our Saviour, that
God is a spirit, and that he will
be worshipped in spirit and in
truth*. And that we may wor-
ship him with our understand-
ings, 'tis necessary for us to consider the na-
ture, use, and end of those ordinances which
he has been pleased to institute, whether for
the worship or discipline that is to be exer-
cised in his church : for there is no ground

* John 4. 24.

to expect that God will accept any service which is done contrary to his will, or any acts of religious worship which he himself has not ordained. As all his promises are annexed to precepts; so it behoves us to perform the one, that we may enjoy the other. And as we are to consider well what we do with regard to the ordinances wherein we profess to serve and honour God; so we should also consider well in what manner and disposition of mind God requires we should serve him: for tho we should perform things rightly, as to the matter of his ordinances, we may be rejected from his presence with shame and confusion of face, if our minds are not so disposed as competently to answer the divine requirement. Our hearts must not be alienated from God, while we pretend to wait upon him with our tongues, and to honour him with our lips, and sit before him as his people.

It was a great sin in the Corinthians, that they did not *discern the Lord's body* in the administration of his holy supper^f; that they wanted that attention and devotion which became them; and did not so consider the end of that institution as they ought. And it behoves us, on the occasion of this day, to consider well what we are going about; that we may be right, not only as to the form and order of the administration of an ordinance

^f 1 Cor. 11. 29.

of Christ, but that the frame and temper of our minds may be suited to such a solemnity. In order to this I have read this passage of the apostle to Titus ; which contains a direction to him how to behave himself in the constituting or *ordaining of elders in every city* where the providence of God gave him opportunity of performing that work ; as well as to *set in order* other things, as he found them wanting. *For this cause left I thee in Crete, &c.*

The character of Titus seems to have been that of an *evangelist*, the next in dignity, as it appears, to the office of an *apostle*. Evangelists were helpers of the apostles in that great work of laying the foundation of churches, and of *setting things in order* amongst them. Their employment was to visit various churches, to preside amongst them, and to set things right, or *set in order those things that were wanting* : whether they had any province besides, and were elders of any particular church, is uncertain. The apostle here declares the design *for which he left Titus in Crete*, where the gospel had been preached, and where various persons were converted to christianity, and where it seems there were churches already constituted. That they might be complete as to their form, that they might be organized with suitable officers, Titus receives a charge from the apostle. He was indeed to *set in order all things that were wanting* ; to give them

them such directions and counsels, and preside amongst them in the exercise of discipline upon occasion, so as that he might acquaint them with the forms and manners of the house of God. But I design not to insist on this general exhortation given to Titus, *to set in order all the things that were wanting*; but on that particular charge only which is adapted to the occasion of our meeting this day; *to ordain elders in every city, as he had appointed him*. Where it appears,

First, That in the several cities of Crete there were particular churches which were to be organized. There were to be *elders ordained in every city*: and these *elders* were no less than *bishops*; no less than what the scripture calls *bishops*. For when the apostle was directing what sort of elders should be ordained, he says in the 6th and 7th verses, which immediately follow the text, *If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children, not accused of riot, not unruly; for a bishop must be blameless, &c.* So that an *elder* and a *bishop* is the same thing in the language of the apostle. He does not appoint this evangelist to constitute *diocesans*, that should have a jurisdiction over the various churches in the cities of Crete; but *in every city* to constitute *elders*, that is, where there were persons fitly qualified for that office. This text therefore gives us an account of the form of the primitive churches: those who could commodiously gather together

together in one city or town, in one neighbourhood, formed a church ; and each such church might have an *elder* or *elders*, a *bishop* or *bishops*, which is the same thing, constituted amongst them.

Secondly, Here is the sort of officers the apostle charges Titus to fix in these churches. They are called *elders* ; which, as I have just now observed, signifies the same as *bishops*. Some suppose that under the title of *elders* is comprehended a lower office in the church, that of *deacons* ; as the apostolick office comprehends those which were subordinate to it. And therefore the apostle Peter calls himself an *elder* : *The elders among you I exhort, who am also an elder*^s. So we find in the primitive time, before the appointment of deacons, that the apostles themselves did exercise that work, which belonged to the office of a deacon. And because that was some hinderance to the discharge of their more important work, therefore this office was constituted, that they might take care of the poor ; and that the apostles, and other ministers of the word, might give attendance unto the special service of *prayer, and the ministry of the word*^t. And because the character of *deacons* agrees so far with that of *bishops* or *overseers*, in various respects, as appears by the account the apostle gives of their qualifications to Titus and also to Ti-

^s. 1 Pet. 5. 1.

| ^t Acts 6. 1—4.

mothy ; it is supposed that these were also accounted *elders* in the church, and so that this name comprehends both *bishops* and *deacons* : both which terms are used by the apostle in the beginning of the epistle to the Philippians ; *To the saints at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons, grace, &c.*

'Tis true, that the name of *elder* is borrowed from the Jews, and from their civil government ; from the magistrates among them, who were called elders, and presided in the city and governed. In allusion to this, the term is transferred to the church of God, and signifies those who preside and govern in the church. And because *discharging of the office of a deacon well, gives a man great boldness in the faith* ^u, and will give him a considerable reputation and authority in the church, and render what he says capable of making a greater impression on the people ; and besides, that such a one ought to be a grave person ; it may, in a lax sense, be supposed to be comprehended under that name. But however that be, 'tis certain that the scripture calls those *elders*, who are elsewhere called *overseers* or *pastors*, as I shall have occasion to shew you presently. And as the apostle expressly charges Titus here *to ordain elders*, if he does not in the same word include that deacons should be ordained ; yet it may be consequently inferred, that seeing

^u 1 Tim. 3. 13.

all things were to be set in order which were wanting in the churches, those churches that wanted deacons, were to have such also ordained among them. And if the greater office was taken care of, the inferior must have been supposed to be provided for by the apostle in this general direction, that he should *set in order those things which were wanting*. So that tho *elders* are spoken of precisely in the text, and not *deacons*; yet seeing this general rule gives sufficient intimation that deacons were to be constituted where they were wanting; and since there are other scriptures which shew the nature of this office, and the manner of ordaining to it; I shall take the liberty to treat of both, that I may the better answer the end of our assembling this day.

As to the word *ordain*, which is here used by our translators, *ordain elders in every city*^v; in the original it signifies to *constitute*, to *create*, to *establish* or *ordain*: and 'tis the same word which is used in the 6th chapter of the Acts, where the apostles speak of the ordination of deacons, when they bid the church *look out such men whom they might appoint*^w, i. e. whom they might ordain or constitute, or invest with that office.

As for the ground on which the apostle thus expresses himself, *as I had appointed thee*; it comprehends the authority upon

^v Καταστήσει κατὰ πόλιν
πρεσβυτέρους.

^w Acts 6.3.

which this charge is founded. As if the apostle had said: "I renew and repeat that charge which I had given thee before I had directed and appointed thee to do this work, which becomes an evangelist, by my apostolical authority; therefore fulfil this charge, and execute this ministry which I have committed to thee."

The words of the text being thus opened, I shall take occasion from thence to consider,

I. The origin and end of this office of elders, and also that of deacons.

II. I shall treat of the qualifications necessary for persons who are invested with these offices: which qualifications are distinct in some respects, and agree in others.

III. I shall discourse of their investiture; and the manner and order by which this is to be done.

I. I am to discourse of the origin and end of these offices.

As to the office of an elder: tho the term, as I intimated before, is borrowed from the civil government among the Jews; yet the office itself is of evangelick authority, and was first appointed under the gospel. There is something in the work of elders which makes them resemble the priests and ministers under the law; but take it in its due compass and extent, it is an evangelick appointment,

pointment, suited to churches under the gospel.

We find there are various names given to this sort of officers: they are called *elders*^x; they are called *bishops*^y, or *overseers*^z; they are called *pastors*^a; they are called *guides*^b; and they seem also to be called *teachers*^c. They may well be called *elders*, which is a term that signifies authority; because they have authority from our Lord Jesus Christ to act in his name, and according to the rule of his word. And they are called *rulers* and *governors* upon the same account: *Obeys them that have the rule over you*^d; as the apostle speaks to the Hebrews. They are called *pastors*, by way of allusion to the work and business of a *shepherd*; which does not unaptly represent that of an elder of a church. The care, the watchfulness, the tenderness, which are necessary in a shepherd, represent after what manner the duty of an *elder* should be performed. And our Lord Jesus Christ, as he has the title of an *apostle* given him^e, so he has also that of a *pastor*: he is called the *great pastor and bishop of our souls*; or, the *great shepherd and bishop of our souls*^f; for 'tis the same word. They are called *bishops* or *overseers*, because they preside to see that all

^x Acts 14. 23.

^y 1 Tim. 3. 1.

^z Acts 20. 28.

^a Eph. 4. 11.

^b Rom. 2. 19.

^c 1 Cor. 12. 28.

^d Heb. 13. 17.

^e Heb. 3. 1.

^f 1 Pet. 2. 25.

things be done rightly, according to the divine will, in the church of God. They preside over the flock committed to their care, as it is their business to take charge of them ; to have regard to their state, and to their good and benefit. And on this account the metaphorical term of *watchman* is likewise applied to them *. An *overseer* signifies as much as a steward, who has a charge of persons or things, and is to take care of what his lord has committed to his trust. They are called *guides* or *leaders* ; and the word in the original is applicable both to those who are such in civil magistracy, and in a military constitution. The ministers of the gospel are represented sometimes as leading the people on in a spiritual warfare, encouraging them in their work and duty, and giving them an excellent pattern ; leading them up against their spiritual enemies, and shewing courage and patience, and constancy under affliction and temptation. Thus, in imitation of magistrates, they preside among the people, conduct and counsel them ; and as civil rulers exercise a civil discipline among them, so do they exercise the discipline of the church, which Christ has ordered for the well-being and preservation of the society. They are called *teachers*, because 'tis a principal part of their work to teach and instruct the people in the truth, and to ex-

* Heb. 13. 17.

hort them to perform their duty. And they are to teach them by their pattern as well as by their preaching: and therefore one of their qualifications, mentioned by our apostle, is, that a *bishop* or *overseer* should be *apt to teach*^h.

Now as these several names are given to the same persons in the holy scriptures; so I am to shew you that they signify the same thing. And there can hardly arise any dispute about this matter, unless it be to know whether the names of *bishop* and *elder* signify the same thing; and that of a *pastor* and *teacher*, whether they also signify the same.

As to the names of *bishop* and *elder*, that they are of the same import, I have in part proved already from this text and context; because when the apostle orders Titus to *ordain elders*, he tells him what are the proper qualifications of a *bishop*. So that the apostle would not speak to his own purpose, if he did not mean by a *bishop* the same thing as by an *elder*. The same is evident from Acts 20. 28. where we see the apostle sent for the elders of the church of Ephesus; and when they came, gave them this charge, *Take heed to the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers*. Thus says our translation: but 'tis the same word in the original which is rendered *bishops* in other places of the new testament; *Take care of*

^h 1 Tim. 3. 2.

the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you bishops. So that he there calls the *elders bishops*, or *overseers*.

Again: when the apostle writes to Timothy concerning the qualifications of persons for *the office of a bishop*, he mentions to him the same qualifications as in this epistle to Titus, when he tells him what an *elder* should be; for, as was said before, he is speaking to him concerning the ordination of *elders*. And when he writes to the church of Philippi, he mentions *bishops* and *deacons*ⁱ, and no other officers; whereas if *elders* had been distinct officers from *bishops*, in all appearance the apostle would have named them. And besides, at Philippi there were divers *bishops*, several bishops in that particular church of Philippi: which is contrary to the notion of a diocesan bishop, who presides over a church, not to say many churches singly. By all this it appears that *bishops* and *elders* are the same.

And that *pastors* and *teachers* signify the same, you may see in the epistle to the Ephesians^k; where the apostle gives an account of Christ's constituting, at his ascension, all things necessary belonging to his church: *He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.* These two last words may very well signify the same office. The *pastor* signifies a person

ⁱ Phil. 1. 1.

^k Eph. 4. 8—12.

who rules and governs, as well as instructs ; and a *teacher* signifies one whose principal gift was in the knowledge and understanding of divine truths, and in being capable to explain them after an apt and pertinent manner to the people. The apostle seems to speak here of an office, and numbers this amongst the offices of *apostles* and *evangelists* ; not but that those who are qualified with competent gifts for the instruction of the church, may, when they are duly called, preach the gospel, tho they are not yet ordained to the office of a *pastor* or *elder* : and tho they can't teach after the same authoritative manner as those who are solemnly ordained, yet however they may have gifts given them of God for the instruction of the people ; and may, if called to it, speak to their edification.

As to the other office, *viz.* that of *deacons* ; there is but one word used to express it. They are called *deacons* or *ministers* : and 'tis easy to know what their work is, by the account given of their character by the apostle Paul, and likewise by the evangelist Luke, in the 6th chapter of the Acts. Their ministry concerns the outward state of the church, as the ministry of elders in a special manner has relation to their spiritual benefit and advantage.

But now having explained to you what terms are made use of to signify these offices ; I proceed to shew that they are of divine appointment.

To begin with that which was last mentioned, the office of a deacon: The account of their institution, and of the reason and necessity of it, in Acts 6. and of the requisite qualifications both there and in 1 Tim. 3. together with the dignity ascribed to the office, is sufficient to prove that the institution is of God. As to the other office, see what the apostle says, 1 Cor. 12. 28. *And God hath set some in the church; first, apostles; secondarily, prophets; thirdly, teachers; after that miracles; then gifts of healing, helps, &c.* Here we find *apostles* an extraordinary office, and the highest in the church. Here are *prophets*, who seem to have been inspired to foretel things to come: and here are *teachers*, who should instruct in the doctrines of christianity, tho they were not capable of predicting things to come. *God hath set, appointed, or constituted some of these in the church.* *Teachers* here seem to be spoken of as a distinct office, and so may signify the same thing as *pastors* or *bishops*. See likewise what the apostle says to the Ephesians: *Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men^l. And he gave some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers^m.* Here *pastors* and *teachers* may seem to be connected together, as signifying the same office, and the distinct works which belong

^l Eph. 4. 8.

^m Ver. 11.

to them : *For the perfecting the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.* And how long was this to last ? *Till we all come to the unity of the faithⁿ, &c.* Till the church is perfected, there will be need of orders and of offices in it. 'Tis true, the *work* of the *apostles* does not seem any more than the *office* to be necessary to the end. The office need not to be continued, if the work did not continue. When christianity was once planted in the world, and churches form'd, the ordinary offices of *elders* and *deacons* may seem sufficient until the coming of Christ ; or at least till the gospel is sent into such parts of the earth as need ministers of no less dignity than the apostles, and who are furnished with the same power of working miracles that they were.

You see these offices are of divine appointment. This is the origin, the spring of them. *God hath set these in the church, and Christ hath given them :* he hath given his Spirit to qualify men for these employments ; and given orders to his apostles to instruct his churches with what officers they should be organiz'd ; and to teach those officers, as well as the people, their work and duty. Which leads me, as I have considered their origin, now to shew their use and end.

As for the office of an *elder*, 'tis appointed in common with that of the *deacon*, for the good of the church ; but, as I intimated

^a Eph. 4. 12, 13.

before,

before, it regards the spiritual good, as the other office regards especially the temporal good of it. The office of an *elder* is constituted for this purpose; that according to the names which are given them, so they should act. They are to minister between God and the people; to offer the prayers, the petitions, the confessions, and the public praises and thanksgivings of the people to God, in the assembly of the church. And as they are to speak from the people to God, so they are to speak from God to the people. They are called *teachers*, because they are to teach the people the mind of God: they are to establish and confirm them therein by the word of God: they are to exhort, and rebuke, and comfort; to reprove those who decline from the faith, *to rebuke them sharply, that they may be found in the faith*; as the apostle directs in the 13th verse of this chapter, wherein is our text. They are to reprove for the commission of sin; and those who sin publicly, are by them to be publicly reprov'd: *those that sin before all, should be rebuked before all* °. They are to exhort and encourage the people to their duty, and to comfort those who are dejected; to imitate our Lord Jesus Christ, who is represented as a *good shepherd* ¢, *gently leading those that are with young* ¤; and expressing abundance of compassion and tenderness towards his

° 1 Tim. 5. 20.

¢ John 10. 11.

¤ Isa. 40. 11.

whole flock. They ought to exercise authority in this, but to do it with great prudence and with meekness ; to *rebuke with all authority*, as the apostle directs Titus ^r, and *with all long-suffering* at the same time, as he directs Timothy ^f. They are to act with abundance of patience and compassion, and yet to abate nothing of the authority of their office : to use that gravity and authority which are requisite for such things as are done in the name of Christ ; and yet with the meekness and patience of the blessed Jesus, in imitation of his pattern. And they are to comfort with great compassion and tenderness ; to sympathize with their brethren in their various circumstances and conditions. Besides this, they are to preside in the church for the exercise of discipline ; to receive in the name of the Lord Jesus those who are fit to be received into a church of Christ, upon their own desire and the consent of the christian society : to reject such as are to be rejected, such as are guilty of heresy, of apostacy, of immorality ; all according to the rule which Christ has prescribed in his word. This is to be done with the consent of the church to which they relate. So the apostle orders the incestuous person to be rejected ^s. Thus our Lord Jesus has appointed, that those should be reputed as *heathens and publicans* ^t, who will not hear the

^r Tit. 2. 15.^f 2 Tim. 4. 2.^s 1 Cor. 5.^t Mat. 18. 17.

voice of his word in his church, but obstinately refuse to submit to his government: *He that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me*^u. They are to preside, I say, for the exercise of discipline: and here they are *to rebuke with all authority*^v, as there is occasion, and to pronounce sentence according to the divine word; those rules being observed, which our Lord has appointed, according to the circumstances of each case. They are likewise to administer the ordinances which Christ has instituted. They are to baptize in his name; and this is in order to the adding to the church. They are to administer the Lord's supper, as Christ has directed and instituted, for the edification of his church likewise. And when they are called by any church of Christ to assist in the ordination of an elder, or elders, or deacons, they may assist in such service; for 'tis to be done *by the laying on of the hands of the eldership*^w, or presbytery. Thus was this ordinance celebrated in the apostle's days; for he himself put Timothy in mind of his ordination after that manner. And if, in the apostolick times, the *elders* assisted at the ordination of a person of so great note and worth as Timothy was; if they assisted with the apostle, supposing that the apostle was present and presided at that time; we may well suppose that

^u Luke 10. 16.^v Tit. 2. 15.^w 1 Tim. 4. 14.

the same constitution is still preserved. The apostle acted according to what he received from Christ; and there is no repeal of this form and order of constituting or *ordaining of elders*: and if there be no officers inferior to elders, who are spoken of in scripture as being concerned in ordaining of others, particularly in ordaining of other elders; why then certainly no inferior officer, or no persons who have not this office of an elder, may presume to engage in such a work. The church of Christ was established by the ministry of the apostles; and I think no body will pretend to find one text of scripture which declares that in their time there was any person ever constituted to the office of an elder or deacon, either by a person who was no officer himself, or by any number of persons who were not invested with the office of eldership. And certainly the church of Christ must be contented to be governed by the directions of Christ and of his apostles, who were immediately commissioned by him to teach the people *to observe all things that he has commanded them* *.

Well; this is the use, this is the end of the office of an elder.

Now as for the office of deacons; you will easily see what use they are of to the church, if you observe the reason of their

* Mat. 28. 20.

constitution in the 6th of the Acts, at the beginning. *And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration, &c. 'Tis not reasonable, say the apostles, that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, look ye out seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word :* q. d. "That will be work enough for us ; therefore look out such as may be appointed deacons, or ministers to serve tables." It seems their office regards the outward condition of the church. The tables of the poor were to be provided for by their care and management out of the stock of the church. The table of the minister may likewise be supposed to be comprehended in this expression of *serving tables*. The tables of the ministers were by them to be taken care of, out of the allowance which the church gave to that purpose. And the tables of strangers ; for the churches in the primitive times were full of hospitality to strangers, and had often occasion to entertain those who came from other churches. These tables were to be taken care of : and they had the care also of the Lord's table, to provide the elements for that holy supper. Thus you may easily discern of how great use this

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office

office was for the well-ordering of the church, and for the exercise of charity. And as you see how much the spiritual nourishment and edification of the people is concerned in the regular discharge of the office of an elder ; so you likewise see what care was taken of their outward circumstances by the appointment of deacons.

Having discoursed of the origin and end of these offices, which you find are constituted plainly in the scripture, and design'd for excellent purposes ; I proceed now,

II. To consider the qualifications prescribed in the sacred word for persons who are to be invested with these offices. And here I may refer you to the context for the qualifications of a bishop or elder.

If any be blameless. Where is the man who lives and sins not ? But in the language of scripture, to be *blameless* or *harmless* is the same with being of a sober and reputable conversation. *Who can stand before God, and justify himself in his sight ?* Yet there are many who can appeal to men as Samuel did of old ; *Whom have I wronged ? whom have I defrauded ?* There are many who, by the grace of God, have been taught to walk *so soberly, righteously and godly in the world*², that there is no remarkable stain upon their lives, such as should bring a discredit to their

¹ 1 Sam. 12. 3.

| ² Tit. 2. 12.

character and office ; and that's the apostle's meaning here : for he says, in the parallel place to Timothy, *they must have a good report amongst them that are without* ^a. Persons who have been of a debauched, profligate conversation, tho they be converted, seem to be excluded from being qualified for the ministerial office ; because tho they be altered, yet the disreputation to religion is like to be such, that 'tis probable more hurt will be done by that stain which sin has left upon their characters, than good can be expected from their ministry. To this purpose the apostle says farther,

He must be *the husband of one wife*. It may be asked ; Does the apostle then allow that those who were not chosen to the office of the ministry might have two wives ? No ; but he seems to have regard to their condition before they became christians. Polygamy was a reproach among sober heathens ; and therefore if a man had had two wives, after he became converted to christianity, this man was not to be put into the office of the ministry, because of the scandal of his having been guilty of that vice before. I know not how, well, to interpret the words of the apostle otherwise : for we must not imagine that he gives this as a discriminating character, as if there were many members of the church who had two wives at the

^a 1 Tim. 3. 7.

time they were members ; and if there were none who had two wives together, what need the apostle give this as a necessary character, to shew that a person could not be qualified for this office unless he were the husband of but one wife ? So that it seems to relate to the polygamy committed before they entered into the church ; and to signify that if they had had two wives before, this left such a scandal upon them, that it could not agree to the *blameless* character of a minister, to have been ever guilty of it. This seems to me the plainest and easiest sense of the place.

Having faithful children, not accused of riot, or unruly : that is, children who are not heathens, as some render it. For if a person were to be invested with the office of an elder, and his family were heathenized, this might be *of ill report* ; and might make people imagine he had not taken that care and pains to instruct them as he ought to have done in the doctrines and duties of the christian religion. For it may seem to have been a much easier matter for a person who was master of a family to convince them of the sin of idolatry, and bring them to hearken to the doctrines of christianity, than for another to have converted them to it. And there is a vast difference between a man's having his children profess'd idolaters, and their professing christianity, tho perhaps they have not the characters of a true conversion.

This latter case ought not to hinder him from engaging in the office of an elder, if it is not owing to his neglect of instructing them. This seems to amount to the same character elsewhere given, *that he should rule his own family well*^b; he should so manage himself in the government of them, that no remarkable blemish should be upon them; that is, supposing he has a family.

For a bishop must be blameless. The apostle repeats it again: a man of an innocent and holy conversation; one who has had no remarkable stain upon his life.

As the steward of God. This denotes the great charge that is committed to him; the trust reposed in him.

Not self-willed. For this might breed great disorder and disturbance in a church. If a man can't be humble, condescending and complaisant, subjecting himself to those who are of low degree, so far as his office will allow him, in order to win them to the practice of religion; he is like to do but little service to the interest of Christ or the souls of men: on the other hand, he will be apt to do a great deal of mischief; for a morose, a proud man, one of a haughty temper, will be like to raise the same passions in others, and set a church of Christ into a flame. He is not therefore to be *self-willed*.

^b 1 Tim. 3. 4, 5.

Not soon angry. Not a passionate, testy man, set into a flame upon all occasions; but one who has patience and meekness, and knows how to govern his own passions.

Not given to wine. It would be a terrible stain indeed upon him if he should be sensual, if he should be intemperate: for this was counted criminal among the heathens themselves; and it would raise in their minds a loathing of such a person who bore the sacred character of an elder, and yet was given to drunkenness. *To wine*; that is, much wine.

No striker. This would be very unbecoming his character: he is to rule and govern as a magistrate in the church of God: he is to govern by reason and by arguments, and motives of religion, by such as are drawn from scripture; but he is not to use force and violence: this is intirely inconsistent with his character, and the dignity of his office.

Not given to filthy lucre. This is in itself a sordid vice, and becomes a minister of Christ the least of any thing in the world; or rather, is the most misbecoming imaginable. 'Tis a sordid thing, I say, in itself, and called *idolatry* in scripture^c. *The love of money is the root of all evil*^d. It may be well called *filthy lucre* in this case on many occasions: as when such persons are capable of bribery for the perversion of justice, or

^c Col. 3. 5.

^d 1 Tim. 6. 10.

can allow themselves to do any thing that is contrary to the will of God, being prepossessed by gifts; when they seek gain after an inordinate manner, and use unlawful means to accumulate it; they are then *given to filthy lucre*. This is not at all spoken in prejudice to the allowance which the word of God gives to the maintenance of a ministry; but 'tis very unbecoming them to seek gain after any sordid and base manner.

But a lover of hospitality: a generous, liberal man, ready to entertain strangers. For it would bring an ill character upon a minister of the gospel, if he should behave himself rudely and unhandsomly towards any person, of whatsoever denomination; towards those who are of a higher station in the world, or a lower. He ought to be charitable to the poor, kind to strangers; to behave himself after a generous and liberal manner, where there is a just occasion given for it; because this is very becoming the gospel, and tends to gain a credit to religion. And by the way, this intimates the duty of the people: for it would be a hard prescription to order the ministers of the gospel to be *given to hospitality*, if they were not to be allowed such an honourable maintenance as might qualify them to be hospitable.

A lover of good men. And that will appear by the choice of his company. He ought to be one who keeps honourable company, the company of pious and good men. That shews

shews his love to such, by his delight in their conversation.

Sober, just, holy, temperate. Sober and grave in his deportment; just and honest in all his dealings, and in the manner of his administration; holy and pious in his behaviour in the worship of God, as well as in his private conversation. He should be a man very pious and religious; devoted to prayer, reading and meditation when alone, as well as behaving himself after a religious and devout manner in the assembly of the saints. He should be *temperate*, i. e. capable of governing his passions; not addicted to sensual pleasures, but maintaining that purity and moderation in all his behaviour which becomes one who is devoted to the immediate service of God.

Holding fast the faithful word, as he has been taught; that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. A man of a stable mind, who, when he has learned the truth, holds it fast, and is not carried about with every wind of doctrine: one who has a solid judgment, and shews a constancy and integrity in adhering to truth. *As he hath been taught the faithful word, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, to exhort and convince gainsayers;* to exhort those who have embraced it to live according to it, and to put to silence those who gainsay it,

Thus the apostle gives the character, or qualifications of an elder, in writing to Titus. And he speaks after the same manner to Timothy; 1 Tim. 3. 2, &c. *A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife; vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre, but patient; not a brawler, not covetous; one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity, &c.* Tho there is some little variation, yet the characters are much the same. There is *vigilance*: he must watch, he must be industrious to perform his duty strictly; he must be a man of a vigilant temper. And as he must be *given to hospitality, and of good behaviour*; so likewise *apt to teach*: all which is to the same purpose as you have heard before.

Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Not a novice; that is, not one newly converted to christianity. The apostle does not mean that he man yot be a young man; for we see Timothy was employed in this sacred service tho he was young; therefore says the same apostle, *let no man despise thy youth.*^e Timothy had been instructed from his childhood in the scriptures, and had been converted some time; so that his mind was imbu'd and tinctured early with the principles

of christianity, and therefore he was not a novice. The advancement of a novice to so honourable an office may puff him up with pride, and so he *may fall into the condemnation of the devil* : and therefore it is not fit that such should be constituted elders.

Moreover, *he must have a good report of them that are without.* So great care does God take of the honour and reputation of religion, that a man who has not a *good report among them that are without*, because he has been profane, is not qualified to be a minister of Christ. *He must have a good report of them that are without, lest he fall into reproach, and the snare of the devil* : he may be reproached otherwise with those vices which have rendered him obnoxious to censure ; and this may discredit his ministry, and so be an occasion of his falling into temptation. He ought to be a person of such a character and behaviour, that his conversation may appear blameless and innocent to all. Thus have I explained to you the qualifications which the scriptures require in a person invested with the office of an elder.

Now follow the qualifications of deacons : which you have in the same chapter. *Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine* ^f, &c. They must be *grave* : it would be very unseemly that any should be invested with this office if they were persons of great levity of mind, or va-

^f 1 Tim. 3. 8—13.

nity of humour, or too young to be trusted with the treasure and stock of the church. They must be *grave* in the temper of their mind, whatsoever their years are.

Not double-tongued. For as they may do much mischief if they can't govern their tongues; so likewise if they are not men of great integrity and sincerity. And as they should not be *double-tongued*, so not *double-minded*. The apostle intimates that they ought to be sincere and upright, and open in their conversation.

Not given to much wine. For as this is a great disreputation to any member; so much more to a deacon, who is an officer in the church of Christ.

Not greedy of filthy lucre. He is to be faithful and just in his actions; and so to dispose of the stock of the church, as not only to approve his integrity, but his delight in the good work in which he is engaged.

Holding the mystery of faith in a pure conscience. One who understands the fundamental principles of the christian religion; or else he would be a scandal to his office. And he should be one who *holds it in a pure conscience*; one who appears to *have a good conscience towards God and towards men*, that he may faithfully discharge his duty. For if he has not this character, how can it be expected he should discharge his duty well?

Let these also first be proved. That is, it seems, they are to be proved according to these

these characters and rules. We are to consider and examine what persons bear these characters upon them ; and if, upon observation and remarking of their lives, and the manner of their behaviour, these characters are competently found, *then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless.*

Even so must their wives be grave. The wives of deacons ought to be sober, grave persons ; and by the same reason those of elders, if they have wives.

No slanderers ; sober, faithful in all things. Or else they might be capable of defrauding the church and the poor.

The deacons must be *the husbands of one wife*, such as never had the scandal of polygamy upon them ; *ruling their own houses well*, as was said before concerning the elders or bishops. And for encouragement in the faithful discharge of this office, the apostle concludes with these words : *For they that use the office of a deacon well, purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith, which is in Christ Jesus.*

You may see likewise something of their qualifications in Acts 6. 3. *Look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom.* And tho that was a time when many private christians were after an extraordinary manner *filled with the Holy Ghost* ; yet the character in general is still

* 1 Tim. 3. 13.

requisite, as it signifies persons of remarkable piety, and who have wisdom and discretion to manage the office well : such as have bowels of compassion, on the one hand, for those who are in necessity ; and such a measure of prudence, on the other, as will not suffer them easily to be imposed upon by such as may be apt to crave what others may want more. And so accordingly *they chose Stephen, a man full of faith, and of the Holy Ghost*^h, &c.

Thus have I, as briefly as I well could, represented to you the qualifications necessary for persons who are to be invested in these offices. It remains that I speak,

III. Of the investing with these offices persons so qualified. There is something belongs to this on the part of God ; something on the part of the church ; something on their own account ; and something on the account of those who are to ordain them.

On the part of God ; these qualifications must be given by him. 'Tis he who has set and constituted these offices in his church ; 'tis he only who can qualify and fit men for the discharge and performance of the duties belonging to them. 'Tis Christ who is *ascended on high*, who *gives gifts unto men*ⁱ, and fits them for his work, of whatsoever kind.

^h Acts 6. 5.

ⁱ Eph. 4. 8.

Then

Then on the part of the church to which such persons do relate who are so gifted and qualified ; it belongs to them to chuse them, to call them out to this service, to desire them to discharge that work and ministry for which God seems to have fitted and qualified them.

As to the persons who are so qualified and chosen ; it belongs to them to devote themselves to the service of God in that office to which they are called, and respectfully to accept of such service for the honour of God and the good of his church.

And it belongs, as I said before, to those who are themselves invested with the office of eldership, to ordain such to this work, and that by imposition of hands.

I. I say, it belongs to God to qualify men for offices in his church. We are not to thrust out any into his harvest who are not qualified and fitted for his work and service. To speak particularly of the office of an elder ; 'tis God who must dispose and prepare men, by his Spirit, for it. What we are to regard is, as near as we can, to fix on those whom God has already destin'd and chosen to such a purpose : and this will best appear to us by the qualifications with which he has furnished them. 'Tis he who gives gifts and graces unto men ; and 'tis a work not to be enter'd upon unless men are competently qualified of God : for besides the dishonour they may bring to God and religion, what comfort

fort can they have in that work for which they are not, in some measure, fitted? There will be nothing but discouragement to themselves; and what is like to be the consequence to the people, under their care, but want of edification, and many inconveniences, under which a church must be supposed to languish? If persons are chosen who are not, in some competent measure, fitted for the work, what can be expected but that the people will have husks instead of bread; and that they will decline in their spiritual vigor, for want of those supplies which God has ordained for their edification? No man is therefore to be called to such a work who is not competently fitted and prepared of God for it, by those qualifications you have heard explained.

2. The church is to be concerned. This is expressly mentioned, in reference to deacons, in the Acts of the apostles: *Look ye out among you such men, that we may ordain them*^k. The people must chuse them; and we find they did so: *The saying pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith, and of the Holy Ghost*^l; &c. They chose them, and set them before the apostles^m; chose them fairly, and presented them to the apostles to ordain them. And if the deacons are to be chosen of the church, there is a parity of reason that elders should

^k Acts 6. 3.

^l Ver. 5.

^m Ver. 6.

be chosen too ; nay, there seems to be a greater reason for it, that the consent of the people should be had to whom they must commit their souls. If they have a right to chuse such officers in the church, to whom they commit the care and management of some part of their money ; 'tis certainly most reasonable they should consent who should teach them, and who should govern them. Even Christ himself, tho *he has all power and authority*, will not preside, in a church-constitution and state, over those who are not willing to be subject to him. He has indeed a kingdom and dominion over the whole world ; and not only all men, but angels and spirits are subjects to him. But as to the peculiar government of his church, he admits none into the number of his subjects but those who consent to be governed by him : so little right have any to impose upon others in these things ; so little right, by persecution, to compel men to be christians. Christ will have *a willing people in the day of his power* ^a : and as he will not govern men without their own consent, and therefore they must devote themselves to him to be members of his church ; so no man has a right to take upon him the government of a society of christians, without their choice and approbation. But this is a matter so plain in itself, and so little, I believe, contested

^a Psal. 110. 3.

by any amongst you, that I need not insist on it.

3. Besides the election of the people, there must be the consent of the person chosen to the office of an elder or deacon. So the apostle Peter prescribes to elders, that they should *take the oversight of the flock, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind*^o. They are not to enter upon this work by compulsion, but being prompted thereto by just and solid reasons; the consideration of the goodness of the work, and the advantage which may be thereby rendered to the interest of our Lord Jesus Christ; the benefit which souls may receive, and the reward that shall be given at the time when our Lord Jesus shall appear; the crown of glory which he will give to those who shall *turn many to righteousness*^p, and who *have watched over his people*, that when he appears, they may *give up their account with joy*^q. It must not be *by constraint*: for Christ will have *a willing people*, and willing officers in his church; those who, upon the most deliberate and mature consideration, will say as some of the Hebrew servants did concerning their masters, *I like my master and his family*^r: and accordingly they had their ears bored, and became their servants for ever. So those who love our Lord Jesus Christ: "I love his work, I chearfully en-

^o 1 Pet. 5. 2.

^p Dan. 12. 3.

^q Heb. 13. 17.

^r Deut. 15. 16, 17.

“ gage myself in it ; tho I must say, *Who is*
 “ *sufficient for these things* ? Yet seeing I
 “ love my Lord and master, I love his ser-
 “ vice ; seeing he takes it as one of the great-
 “ est instances of love to him, seeing he *bids*
 “ *me feed his sheep* ; and seeing he has, in
 “ some measure, qualified me for his work,
 “ and his people have called me to it ; I will
 “ be a servant in his house as long as I live.”

Not that a man is fixed down to this or that particular society of christians as long as he lives : there may be consent on all hands, which may make it practicable for him to remove. But there must be a willingness of mind. God will have a sacrifice offered willingly to him ; and therefore he who is devoted to this work, must offer himself as a free-will offering. And indeed a man had need have a willing mind to it : or else, when he foresees the various censures and reflections which are like to be cast upon him, the many burdens he must bear, and that the more censured, the more diligent and faithful he must be in his duty ; he makes a very unhappy choice of an employment. A man had need be willing, who foresees all this, and yet shall engage in it : for it must not be for base ends, but *of a ready mind*, to serve God and honour him.

4. A person to be invested in this office, must be ordained *by the presbytery*, or eldership ; that is, by those who are elders them-

1 2 Cor. 2. 16.

1 2 John 21. 15, 16, 17.

selves :

selves : and this *with laying on of hands*. There are several passages of scripture which may give us light into this affair.

There was an extraordinary ordination of an apostle in the 1st of the Acts, an apostle in the room of Judas. It seems *they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, and Matthias. And they prayed and said ; Thou, Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, shew which thou hast chosen*^t. Here seems to have been an extraordinary way ; they fix'd upon two they thought were best qualified, and then it was referred to a lot. We need not doubt this was by the direction of the apostles of our Lord. *And the lot fell upon Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles*^u.

As to the ordination of deacons, you find that 'twas done by imposition of hands ; Acts 6. 3. *Whom we may appoint*, says the apostle ; that is, whom we may ordain *over this business*^v : the same word which is used in our text, *that thou mayst ordain*, or appoint *elders in every city*. It follows, ver. 6. *whom they set before the apostles ; and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them*. Here is ordination of deacons, and that by the imposition of hands. See moreover the 13th chapter of the Acts, at the beginning : *Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers, as Barnabas and Simeon, &c. The Holy Ghost said, Separate*

^t Acts 1. 23, 24.

^u Ver. 26.

^v Οὐς καταστήσωμεν ἐπὶ τῆς
χρείας ταύτης.

me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. Some think it was for that special service to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, that they were ordained upon this occasion; for indeed the apostle Paul received his ministry immediately from our Lord Jesus Christ: but if he, upon this occasion, did receive an ordination, tho to fulfil a particular kind of ministry, by imposition of hands; by a stronger reason should we, in ordinary times, submit to it for the service of a church of Christ. See moreover the 14th of the Acts. You read there of the travels and sufferings of Paul and Barnabas, and of their progress in the work of God: and, in the 22d verse, how they *returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch; confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith: and when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord on whom they had believed.* They ordained them elders in the church, and prayed with fasting: and there is no doubt to be made of the imposition of hands, seeing we read of it in other cases of the like kind. For that purpose see what the apostle says to his son Timothy: *Lay hands suddenly on no man; neither be partaker of other mens sins*^w. This is to the same purpose as when

^w 1 Tim. 5. 22.

he gives the qualifications of a bishop : as much as to say, “ consider well that those “ be duly qualified on whom you shall lay “ your hands.” And ’tis hard to suppose it of any other than the ordination of persons to the office of eldership, or deacons. And then again, in this same epistle : *Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery* *, or of the eldership.

Thus the matter seems plain from scripture. But because there are some objections moved against this, both against ordination of elders, and against doing it by imposition of hands ; ’tis requisite I should say a little more to it.

’Tis objected by some, concerning ministers, that other elders are not said to ordain them besides the apostles ; and that the apostleship comprehended in it eldership : and therefore they think this matter is now antiquated and deceased with the office of the apostleship.

I answer : we are to take that in Timothy, concerning *laying on of the hands of the eldership*, to signify those elders who were in the church of which Timothy was a member ; because this is the most natural, easy, and obvious sense ; unless there be some reason to compel us to take the words in another sense. He does not call the apostles *the eldership* ; nor is this phrase used of them, ex-

* 1 Tim. 4. 14.

clusive of others. So that tho the apostleship did, as the greater office, comprehend the lesser: yet when *eldership* is spoken of with *laying on of hands*, there is no necessity to understand this of apostles; for there were elders who were not apostles.

In the next place we are farther to consider, that in the commission to *teach* and to *baptize*, and then to *teach* the people *all things that Christ had commanded*^y; if this should be limited only to the apostles who did these things at the first, what shall become of religion in the world, since there are no apostles to instruct the people, and to baptize? But the nature of the duties enjoined, and the terms of the commission, the extent of which should be *to the end of the world*; shew it should have regard to the ordinary ministers of the word: and they are *elders*, and they may teach and baptize, and instruct in all things relating to the house of God.

'Tis farther objected, that *the appointment* spoken of, or the *ordaining*, signifies no more than that those apostles or elders presided, so far as to give instruction how such things should be done; but that they did not ordain the persons.

This is putting a mere force upon the words; for can there be words more express than that which signifies *appoint*, *ordain*, or *constitute*? This is used with reference to elders and deacons: and in the 14th chapter

^y Mat. 28. 19, 20.

of the Acts, the word used signifies a *choice*²; and if it be precisely to be referred to the apostles, signifies their delegation of them to the work, tho' actually chosen by the people, according to the rite which Christ has constituted in his church. Besides, 'tis evident who it was that ordained them, seeing with the word *ordain* is joined the ceremony of laying on of hands. Did they lay on their hands, and all this not signify they ordained them? This would be strangely to pervert the common sense of the word.

'Tis farther objected, that the text in the 14th of the Acts, where they are said to have *ordained*, signifies *election*: and so the meaning of it is only that they were present in that church, and the church elected and ordained while the apostles were present.

But 'tis certain, that whether you will call it *ordaining* or *election*, it is expressly mentioned as the act of the apostles; and the ceremony they did it with, was the imposition of hands. 'Tis true, that word does properly signify *electing*, or *chusing by holding up the hand*. It was a custom among the Athenians to chuse their magistrates by way of vote or suffrage; and when candidates were set up, the matter was decided by the majority of hands: and therefore the word in the original, which is translated *electing* or *chusing*, signifies lifting up of hands. This

² ΧΕΙΡΟΤΟΝΗΣΑΥΤΕΣ.

custom was transferred to the Romans. 'Tis true, they had another custom of chusing magistrates, by lot; and the apostles constituting an apostle among them this way, may seem to resemble that. As the ordinary manner of chusing officers among the Greeks, was by holding up the hand by way of suffrage; this, I say, was transferred to the Romans, and other nations, in their choice of magistrates. But then the word is likewise used in several authors, both profane and ecclesiastical, to signify the *ordination* or *constituting* of persons *in an office*. And to this purpose it seems to be used concerning Paul and Barnabas, in the text under consideration. 'Tis hard to make that the act of the people which the text makes the act of Paul and Barnabas: the dispute is about the word, and their act of ordaining express'd by that word. If *they* are said to chuse, we must suppose 'twas their approbation of the choice of the church; their agreeing such persons should be sent out upon such work, and be invested with such an office: but there cannot be an ordination without the concurrence of the eldership.

But the word is used, as I said before, by good authors, both sacred and profane, to signify a person's being *ordained to*, or *invested with*, an office. Maximus Tyrius, when he is speaking of the horse of Darius,

* Acts 14. 23.

at whose neighing he was *appointed* to be king, by a previous agreement amongst the nobles of Persia ; uses this word, to express his being fix'd in that office, by the neighing of the horse : he says, *the horse chose him by suffrage* ^b. The meaning is plainly this ; that he was *constituted*, or *ordained* to be a prince, by that token and mark which they had agreed upon ; he whose horse first neighed when they came into such a place. Now the word, as there used, shews that 'tis impossible it should be understood as some people pretend it always signifies.

Philo, who was contemporary with the apostles themselves, uses the word in this sense, concerning Joseph's being *constituted* Pharaoh's lieutenant ^c. And so Theodoret, on the same occasion ^d. There could be no suffrage, strictly speaking, where there was but a single person to constitute him in an office ; and therefore it must mean his *ordaining him* with this character, that he should be the greatest man next the king. And there is a passage in Josephus, where the word *χειροτονῶν* is used to the same purpose, with regard to king

^b Αὐτὸν ἐχειροτόνησεν ἐπὶ τῷ ἀρχικῷ ὕδατι ἵππος. Max. Tyr. Dissertat. 19.

^c Ὅτε βασιλέως ὑπαρχὸν ἐχειροποιεῖτο. Phil. Jud. Lib. περὶ Ἰωσήφ. Ita de Mose—ἡμῶν ἐχειροτονεῖτο, &c. Ibid.

^d Ἀπάντων με τῶν κατὰ τὴν δικίαν κηδεμόνα κεχειροτόνηκεν ὁ δεσπότης, καὶ τὸν νεώτερον ἄνδρα ἡμιμονεῖν ἀπάντων ἐκέλευσε. Theodoret. orat. 8. de providentia, tom. 4. p. 413. edit. Paris. 1642.

Alexander's appointing Jonathan high-priest of the Jews ^e.

Chrysostom particularly uses this very word of *chusing by suffrage, or lifting up the hand*; but he uses it to signify *ordination*, when performed by persons who are in office themselves. *This*, says he, *is ordination*, (or you may call it a delegation) *the hand is laid upon the man*; but 'tis God who works all, and his hand first touches the head of the person ordained, (there the same word is used) *if he be ordained as he ought to be* ^f: there the same word is used again. So that 'tis plain Chrysostom uses this word to signify the act of ordaining by the touching or imposition of hands. And when he speaks of those words of our Saviour, of *praying to the Lord of the harvest to send forth labourers into his harvest* ^g; he says, 'tis Christ who *presently or immediately ordains them* ^h: and he uses the word χειροτονεῖν to signify the act of Christ; which is far from the sense of an election by the people.

^e Βασιλεὺς Ἀλέξανδρος Ἰω-
νάθην τῷ ἀδελφῷ χρίσιν. Τὴν
μὲν ἀνδρείαν σε καὶ πίσιν ἀκηκό-
αμεν παλαι, καὶ διὰ τὸ το-
πόμαμεν πρὸς σε περὶ φιλίας
καὶ συμμαχίας· χειροτονούμεν δὲ
σε σήμερον ἀρχιερεῖα τῶν Ἰου-
δαίων, καὶ φίλον ἐμὸν καλεῖσθαι.
Antiq. lib. 13. cap. 2. p. 559.
edit. Hudson.

^f Τὸ τοῦ ἡ χειροτονία ἐστὶν ἡ

χειρ ἐπίκειται τῷ ἀνδρὶ. τὸ
ἦ πᾶν ὁ θεὸς ἐργάζεται, καὶ ἡ
αὐτοῦ χειρ ἐστὶν ἡ ἀπλομένη τῆς
κεφαλῆς τῷ χειροτονούμενῳ, ἐάν
ὡς δεῖ χειροτονῇται. Chrysost.
homil. 14. in Acta, tom. 4.
edit. Savil. pag. 690.

^g Luke 10. 2.

^h Αὐτὸς αὐτοῦς εὐθέως χει-
ροτονεῖ. Id. homil. 32. in Mat.
tom. 2. p. 218.

The ecclesiastical canons likewise use the word in the same sense as our translators, who render it *appoint* : and whatever dispute there is about the author or authors of these canons, there is no doubt it is an antient book. *Let a bishop, or overseer, be ordained by two or three bishops*ⁱ. Here the same word is used as in Acts 14. And 'tis plain that this must refer to ordination, and not to election : and so Balsamon understands it^k. And thus Hesychius, the Grammarian, interprets the word χειροτονεῖν by καθίστην, which is the same word that is used in our text, and signifies strictly and simply to constitute ; as well as by ἀπορίζειν, to determine by suffrage.

Since therefore the word χειροτονεῖν is used both in ecclesiastical writers and profane authors to signify one person's *ordaining*, or *sending forth* another, *constituting* another in an office ; it seems most natural to understand it so in Acts 14. seeing the word there must be referred to Paul and Barnabas ; and *suffrage* does not agree to them so well, that being the act of the people.

As to the imposition of hands ; there is an objection against that, because extraordinary and miraculous gifts are not now given as they were in the apostles times. But it can't be denied that imposition of

ⁱ Ἐπίσκοπος χειροτονεῖται
ὑπο ἐπισκόπων δύο ἢ τριῶν.
Can. 1. Apostol.

^k Vid. Theodor. Balsamon
ad Can. Apost. 1.

hands

hands was used then ; and why should it not be now used, unless it be repealed ? If there are not such miraculous gifts which attend this now, it does not follow that because they were sometimes given by imposition of hands, they were always given : as it was used for healing at some times, so for ordination of officers at other times. And the ceremony is, in itself, so simple and innocent, and at the same time so significant, that one would wonder any person should be so angry with it, when we have so plain precedents for it in the primitive church. And this law has never been altered or repealed, that we read of in the holy scripture ; and therefore may very well be used.

The miraculous gifts sometimes attended baptism, we must not neglect that ordinance because they are not given now immediately upon it : so there is no reason we should throw off this ordinance of imposition of hands, because miraculous gifts do not attend it.

It signifies a blessing : not only a designation, to shew these are persons appointed to an office, and to signify the approbation of those elders who may be supposed to have a competent judgment to know when persons are qualified ; but besides this it signifies a consecration, or a devoting them to the service of God ; *the offering up the saints being well-pleasing to God*, as was the offering up

up the converted *Gentiles* ¹. So when a minister is devoted to God on this occasion, those who assist, offer him up to God; and he offers up himself to God, to be devoted to him in such a station and relation to the church.

I think I have said what is necessary to justify our manner of proceeding. I know there are other trifling objections; but I think I have obviated those which seem to have the greatest colour of reason. Nor need I farther insist upon any thing in opposition to the vain fancy of those who would have private members of a church to ordain, when there is not so much as one instance in scripture to justify such a kind of ordination; and when their part is another thing, namely, to elect.

Now, my brethren, as we see the rule by which we should go; it behoves us to advert thereunto. I have enlarged a little the more on the qualifications of persons to be devoted to these offices, because I was willing to take occasion to shew them what duties are incumbent on them when they engage in such services. And I must particularly exhort my brother, who is chosen by this congregation to the office of a pastor, to consider the qualifications which, from the sacred scriptures, I have set before him;

² Rom. 15. 16.

and

and frequently to read them, and learn from thence his great duty, that he may discharge it faithfully towards God and towards men.

You are to consider, my brother, that 'tis a special honour and dignity conferred upon you to be engaged in this so solemn and sacred a service: and whatsoever difficulties and burdens you may meet with in the way, all will be made up by the supply of divine grace, while you keep faithful to your duty. *The great shepherd and bishop of our souls*^m will never leave us destitute of his mercy, while we perform the duties belonging to our charge as becomes us. You are to be *instant in season and out of season*; to *teach*, to *rebuke*, to *exhort*, and to *comfort with all long-suffering and doctrine*ⁿ: you are to *study*, in order to these, to *shew yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*^o. You are to endeavour to preserve the church from corrupt doctrines, and improve the people under your instruction and care in *knowledge and understanding*^p. You are to be *a pattern to the flock*^q, that they may learn from your behaviour, as well as preaching, how they ought to practise the duties of the christian religion. You are to *watch over their souls*^r; to pray ear-

^m 1 Pet. 2. 25.

ⁿ 2 Tim. 4. 2.

^o 2 Tim. 2. 15.

^p Jer. 3. 15.

^q 1 Pet. 5. 3.

^r Heb. 13. 17.

nestly for them in private as well as in publick. You are, upon all proper occasions, *to shew yourself ready to every good word and work*. You are to seek their increase in number, by the conversion of sinners, in preaching the gospel of Christ. And you are to seek their edification, their increase in knowledge and in grace. Those qualifications I have mentioned, and many other passages of scripture, shew that this is your work and duty. You are *to give them their food in due season*^f, and administer the ordinances as occasion offers itself. You are to exercise discipline amongst them with meekness and humility; and yet *to magnify your office*^g, by doing what you do, in the name and authority of the Lord Jesus: which should make an impression upon your own mind, by considering that *you must give an account*^h; and an impression on their minds, considering that your words, when according to the rule of Christ, will have their weight. *Whatsoever is so bound on earth, is bound in heaven; and whatsoever is so loosed on earth, is loosed in heaven*ⁱ. You are *to study to shew yourself approved*^j after this manner.

And it may necessarily be inferred, that they also to whom you minister, must needs have duties incumbent upon them: the re-

^f Mat. 24. 45.

^g Rom. 11. 13.

^h Heb. 13. 17.

ⁱ Mat. 18. 18.

^j 2 Tim. 2. 15.

lation they bear to their pastor, ought to make them submissive and humble: they ought to suffer the word of exhortation; to hear the word of God with reverence; to attend the ministry, which, according to the divine rule, is established in the church of God: they ought to support and maintain those they call to that service: the people ought to encourage them, and stand by them in a time of suffering and affliction, if that befall them for the sake of Christ. They ought to perform various duties on their part, which I need not insist on, because it is a province which another has undertaken.

This ought to put us in mind, my brethren, who have been already constituted in this office, *to take heed to our ministry, that we also fulfil it* ^w. We ought to have the same sentiments, with my brother, upon this occasion. We may, perhaps, have cause to look back with sorrow, that we have served Christ no better, and no more *adorned the doctrine of our blessed Saviour* ^x; that we have preached, and no more recommended the word we preach, by a suitable pattern to the flock. We should, upon this occasion, revive in our minds those sentiments which we had when we were solemnly ordained; and take care, for time to come, to honour and serve our Lord

^w Col. 4. 17.

.1 ^x Tit. 2. 10.

better,

better, that we may have a comfortable appearance before him at the last.

And this I would speak for the encouragement of us all ; that those whom God has made us instruments to convert, *will be our crown, and joy, and glory in the day of the Lord^y* : those whom we have *turned from the error of their ways^z* ; those whom we have reclaimed by a suitable reproof ; those whom we have comforted by good advice and tender instructions ; those whom we have led into the knowledge and love of the truth, and into a conscientious discharge of the duties of religion, we shall have joy of them in the day of our Lord's appearance ; when we shall be able to say, *Lord here am I, and the children whom thou hast graciously given me^a*. 'Tis true, we have so many defects and infirmities, that we could not stand before our Lord, were he not of infinite compassion and mercy : but *the chief shepherd of our souls^b* will reward us according to his mercy, and forgive our infirmities, while we seek to serve and honour him.

And as for you, my brethren, who are chosen to the office of deacons ; consider that 'tis a good work, and they are honourable qualifications which are required in you.

^y 1 Theff. 2. 19.

^z James 5. 20.

^a Gen. 33. 5.

^b 1 Pet. 5. 4.

Your work is honourable, to be called ministers in the church of Christ; for so the word *deacons* signifies: and our Lord Jesus, who will take every kindness as done to him which is done to his poor, with what joy will he receive you; and with what joy will you be filled at last, when he shall say, *I was hungry, and ye fed me; thirsty, and ye gave me drink?* &c. You will especially have the comfort of those words, because 'tis your business to take care of the poor. Remember, when inconveniences and troubles shall meet you in the discharge of your office, that what you have done is done for Christ; and every thing that is done for a poor member of his body, is reckoned as done to himself. You are to use discretion and prudence; to seek to God for wisdom, to be faithful in the discharge of your work: and so you will honour God, and walk regularly in the office prescribed to you. Let me therefore exhort you to undertake it with willingness and chearfulness; for ~~tho~~ there is labour and care in it, yet being done for our Lord Jesus Christ, *when the great shepherd and bishop of our souls shall appear*, you also will have your reward.

^c Mat. 25. 35.





S E R M O N IV.

Preach'd at

SPITTLE-FIELDS, June 16, 1700.

I COR. i. 23, 24.

But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

The first S E R M O N on this text.



AS the power and wisdom of God are very conspicuous in the works of creation and providence; so they easily and deeply impress the minds of those who but moderately attend to them. Even a transient view of the divine works, in the formation and government of the world, will engage men to acknowledge that God is *wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working*^c. And

^c Isa. 28. 29.

it seems reasonable to suppose, that if he discovers himself in any extraordinary dispensation, if he *brings to pass any new thing in the earth*^d, especially if he erects a government and kingdom which shall be term'd *a new creation, new heavens, and a new earth, in which dwelleth righteousness*^e; it might seem reasonable, I say, to expect the same characters of *power* and *wisdom* in a work of this kind. Therefore thus far the *Jews* and the *Greeks*, i. e. the *Jews* and *Gentiles*, were in the right to inquire whether these characters were to be found in the things which the apostles delivered, the doctrine which they preached, and the spiritual kingdom which they pretended to erect in the world. But they were to blame, that they did not attend with that care and diligence which became them to inform themselves of this matter; for if they had, there's no question to be made but they might have been easily satisfied that these marks were to be found upon the dispensation of the gospel by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. But taking only a superficial view of matters, it seem'd to them very unlikely that this great prince, who was spoken of, should be *crucified in weakness*^f; and this doctrine of the gospel, which taught men self-denial, and that *thro' much tribulation they must enter into the kingdom of God*^g, should be wisely

^d Isa. 42. 9.^e 2 Pet. 3. 13.^f 2 Cor. 13. 4.^g Acts 14. 22.

calculated to make its way in the world by gaining a multitude of profelytes. They were shock'd therefore at this new doctrine concerning a crucified Saviour; and not being able to discover in it those characters of *power* and *wisdom*, which must be in any work that is becoming the great God, they concluded it was but weakness and folly. This is what the apostle declares in the words of our text: *We preach Christ crucified; to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness.*

Yet there were some who were more attentive and considerate, and took a narrower view of things; and they had quite other sentiments concerning this doctrine than the generality either of Jews or Gentiles; those that were called: these esteemed this administration of grace by a crucified Redeemer, to contain abundance of wisdom and power. Therefore the apostle adds; *but to them who are called, Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God.*

As to the occasion of his treating on this subject at the beginning of his epistle to the Corinthians; we are to consider, that this church was planted by this apostle, as you will find in the 18th chapter of the Acts. His ministry at Corinth met with great opposition, but yet was very successful: there were both Jews and Greeks who opposed the doctrine of the gospel; and there were some of both who at length embraced it.

We read that *he reasoned in the synagogue there every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks*^g. And you will find afterwards the great opposition which was made against him. After the apostle had established them in the doctrine of the gospel, having resided with them more than a year and a half, he writes this epistle to cure several disorders which had happened amongst them by the ambition of some false teachers, who endeavoured to magnify themselves at the expence of this great apostle's credit, and represented him but as *foolish and weak* in comparison of themselves; as appears in both his epistles to the Corinthians, wherein he often, using their language, speaks of his own *weakness and foolishness*, and takes occasion to censure them for such accusations.

The apostle having told them, after his common salutation in the beginning of this epistle, that *he had heard there were differences amongst them*^h; he shews the great absurdity of their falling into parties and factions, seeing they all professed the name of Jesus Christ; and how very absurd it was in some of their teachers, who appeared to have been ambitious to gain proselytes to themselves, to be called by their own names: *one saying, I am of Paul; another, I am of Apollos; and another, I am of Cephas; and another, I am of Christ*ⁱ. Not that these

^g Acts 18. 4.^h 1 Cor. 1. 11.ⁱ Ver. 12.

were the several heads named for the various parties amongst them: but these false teachers called them by their own names, and the people called themselves by the names of their teachers: which the apostle shews, in a figurative way of speaking, was as absurd as if one christian should say, I am of the party of Christ; and another, I am of the party of Paul; and another, I am of the party of Cephas; when the same common name of christians was agreeable to them all.

Is Christ therefore divided? says the apostle; *were ye baptized in the name, or into the name, of Paul^k?* Were you baptized into any other name than the name of Christ? were you the disciples of any other than of Jesus? As much as to say; “ ’Tis a shame
“ for you to call yourselves by the name of
“ this and that, and the other person, who
“ pretends to be a minister of Christ; just
“ as the disciples of the philosophers were
“ denominated from the head of each sect.
“ It is not only a disgrace to you to take
“ upon you the name of the servant when
“ you bear that of the master, but has
“ a sad tendency to stir up faction and
“ strife amongst you.” The apostle takes occasion from hence *to thank God that he had baptized but very few amongst them^l*; for as things fell out, he found it was best

^k Ver. 13.

| ^l Ver. 14, 15, 16.

it should be so ordered by providence, that none might pretend he baptized in his own name, because he had the honour to plant this church as a servant of Christ. He adds this reason why he baptized so few, because he would not have it supposed he made proselytes for himself, or for his own honour: for, says he, in the 17th verse, *Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel*; that is, not so much to baptize as to preach the gospel, which is my principal work.

Not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. The apostle seems to have been traduced as if he was a person who wanted eloquence; and he lets them know there was no necessity of it for the publication of the gospel: this he shews here and in the following chapter. “ *Not with wisdom of words: i. e.* “ with that pompous eloquence, and that “ affected manner of speech which the philosophers used to persuade their auditors: “ *lest the cross of Christ should be made of* “ *none effect*; lest any should think we “ gained disciples rather by oratory than the “ strength of argument.”

“ *For the preaching of the cross is to them* “ *that perish, foolishness*; but unto us which “ *are saved, it is the power of God.* Those “ who destroy themselves for lack of knowledge, for want of attending to the doctrine of the gospel, they count it a foolish system, which is not worth their while

“ to learn, and so go on securely in the way
 “ of perdition. *But unto us which are saved,*
 “ *it is the power of God: we have found it*
 “ to be the power of God by our own ex-
 “ perience, and its influence upon our hearts,
 “ as well as otherwise known the divine
 “ power which has attended this doctrine.”

For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent^m. This is foretold, says he, by the spirit of prophecyⁿ, that God will confound the wisdom of those who vainly conceit themselves wise, those great philosophers who pretend to shew the people the way to happiness; and it will be found that their methods and schemes are ineffectual.

Where is the wise^o? that is, where is the philosopher, the wise man among the Greeks? Where is the scribe? that is, the wise and learned doctor among the Jews. Where is the philosopher who pretends to understand the nature of things so well? Where is the Rabbi, the doctor of the law, who pretends to understand the scriptures so well, and yet both deny the great and important truths of the gospel? Where is the disputer of this world? the caviller, who deals sophistically, and makes so great appearance and shew of argument, when at the same time there is really no good sense nor reason at the bottom of what he says? These are

^m 1 Cor. i. 19.

ⁿ Isa. 29. 14.

^o Ver. 20.

terms by which the apostle reflects severely upon those who conceited themselves so wise. *Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?* that is, shewn the wise men of the world that they are foolish?

For after that in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God; it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe.^o Whereas they, with all their wisdom, have not been able to reclaim the people from idolatry, and have themselves fallen into gross errors, notwithstanding the evidence of the one only true God, which might be collected from the works of nature; while they have been ignorant of those principles, which are so easy to be found by inspecting the works of God in the creation of the world; it has pleased God, by a new institution, by teaching the doctrine of a crucified Jesus, to save them who believe.

For the Jews, says he, *or since the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified*^p. The Jews were brought out of Egypt; their ancestors, I mean, were brought from thence by a mighty hand and stretched-out arm, and by various miracles, such kind of miracles as were very astonishing: and they require some such sign. Indeed our Saviour's testimony of himself, and his apostles testi-

^o 1 Cor. I. 21.| ^p Ver. 22.

mony of him, had been confirmed by sufficient miracles; but the Jews required some extraordinary sign, as fire from heaven, or a thundering voice, such an appearance as was upon mount Sinai, something which might shew great power and majesty, and might strike the minds of men with abundance of terror: and therefore because the miracles of the gospel were of another sort, and because our Lord Jesus Christ suffered death himself upon the cross, and did not save himself when he was called upon so to do; they were not contented with the evidence which was given of the truths of the gospel: *They require a sign. And the Greeks seek after wisdom.* Reason and good sense the Greeks pretended to seek after; and they were inquisitive what specious arguments would be produced for the proving of the doctrine of a crucified Saviour; not considering that this was not to be known by the light of nature, it being the *counsel of God which was hid from ages and generations*^a, and could never have been known but by his own revelation.

But we preach Christ crucified; unto the Jews a stumbling-block; that is, to the Jews who seek for a sign. They stumble at the doctrine of the gospel, because not evidenced by such a sign as they themselves would require. And unto the Greeks foolishness; be-

^a Col. 1. 26.

cause they think it can't be proved by any reasons or arguments taken from the light of nature. *But*, says the apostle, *unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks*; that is, who are converted, *who are called to be saints*, as he expresses it in the beginning of this chapter, *both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God.* The very thing which the Jews and Greeks, that is, the generality of them, can't find in the doctrine of the gospel, even that is found by some few: the power and wisdom of God appeared to them amidst all this weakness and folly, which occasioned the others to stumble.

Having given you this account of the occasion of the words, I shall consider these three parts in them.

- I. The account which the apostle gives us of the manner of his preaching the gospel: which must be taken to be the same with that of his fellow-labourers in the work of the ministry; and which, at the same time, informs all those, who in succeeding ages are engaged in this service, after what manner they are to preach, what is the doctrine they are to insist on, namely, *Christ crucified. We preach Christ crucified.* This is the business, this is the employment of those who minister the word,

word, to preach Christ as crucified for sinners.

II. Here is an account of the prejudices of the generality of men to whom the gospel is preached. The doctrine of a crucified Saviour is not well received by the generality of men; 'tis *to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness*; and there is no new thing under the sun, but many at least, of the same prejudices which shock'd the Jews and Greeks then, hinder others now from embracing the same gospel.

III. Here is an account of the different entertainment of the gospel by some few, both Jews and Gentiles. They had quite other sentiments of it than the generality of mankind; it was to them *the power of God, and the wisdom of God*. It appeared to them to have the same beauty and excellency which the others pretended was not to be found in it. And there is still the same lustre and glory upon it in various respects, as was in the primitive times: and therefore we justly account this doctrine of *Christ crucified*, that is, the scheme of the christian religion, to contain in it abundance of the *wisdom and power of God*.

I. I am to insist on the business and employment of the apostles, and consequently other

other ministers of the gospel ; which is to preach Christ, and him crucified : *We preach Christ crucified.* 'Tis true, the apostle speaks of this in the following chapter as the design he took in hand, and the work he engaged in, when he first founded this church at Corinth : *For I determined, says he, not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified*^r. When he came to declare to them the testimony of God, he *determined not to know any thing among them but Jesus Christ, and him crucified* : and as this was the doctrine he had insisted on at first ; so he declares, in the words of our text, 'twas the same doctrine he was still preaching, and was willing constantly to make the subject of his ministrations. But then in this doctrine of Jesus Christ as crucified, there are several parts to be considered.

1. That Jesus is the Christ : for this the apostles endeavoured to prove when they came first to plant the christian religion.

2. The doctrine of his crucifixion, with the necessary consequences and effects of it ; that is, those other doctrines which depend upon the doctrine of the cross of Christ.

3. The offer and proposal of salvation both to Jews and Gentiles ; to all who shall believe and entertain the gospel.

These are the three things which may be comprehended in these terms : for without

^r 1 Cor. 2. 2.

believing that *Jesus is the Christ*, what would it signify for the apostle to declare that there was a certain person crucified at Jerusalem? Without declaring the crucifixion of Christ, how was it possible for him to explain those great doctrines which are required to be believed in order to our salvation? And without making the offer and proposal of salvation to sinners, to such as should believe the gospel; how was it likely that the attention of any would be engaged to inquire into such a doctrine as this is, a doctrine against which so many were prejudiced? But in that there is a kind offer of salvation, and in that the apostles explained the doctrine of Christ's crucifixion, in order to propose it as *a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance*¹; there was what might reasonably excite the attention of men to inquire into it: and this was the way to give such satisfaction to the judgment of such inquirers, as might induce them to embrace it.

1. The first proposition then that is to be considered as contained in this doctrine of Christ crucified, is, that *Jesus is the Christ*. I need not largely insist on the proof of this, because I suppose I am speaking to those who believe it; but it was necessary for the apostles to prove this, because they ordinarily first addressed themselves to the Jews, who were scattered in various Gentile cities:

¹ 1 Tim. 1. 15.

and

and they would not have proceeded after a rational manner without convincing them first that Jesus was the Messias ; nor could they expect to be believed till they had proved this point plainly to them. 'Tis true, this, as well as other of the fundamental doctrines of christianity, and those of natural religion also, are, upon occasion, fit to be discoursed of amongst those who believe them, for the confirmation and establishment of their faith ; and to preserve them from the corrupt principles of those who oppose them. But I design to treat on this only in the general, to give a representation of the way which the apostles took to prove that Jesus was the Messiah ; that I may shew the method they took was reasonable, and their arguments convincing, if they had been well considered. There were two ways then by which they proved this, that Jesus was the Messiah : the one was by the prophecies of the old testament ; and the other was by the miracles of the new.

To prove that Jesus was the Christ, was to prove that he was that prophet spoken of in the old testament under so many glorious characters ; who was described so many ways, and concerning whom so many marks were given, that he might be known and distinguished from all other persons whenever he came into the world. They proved therefore, by divine testimony, that Jesus of Nazareth was the great person who was expected

expected by the Jews: for none can read the old testament but must find this person spoken of by various names and titles, which eminently distinguish him. There are abundance of things said of him, both what he was to do, and what to suffer; what opposition he should meet with, and what success should attend him: therefore the apostles acted very reasonably when they opened the holy scriptures to the people, and alledged that *Jesus was the Christ*.

Among other passages to this purpose, I shall cite but a few to shew you that this was the manner of the apostle Paul. As soon as he was converted, 'tis said, in the 9th of the Acts, and 20th verse; *And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God*. And then in the 22d verse: *And Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ*; that is, was the very Messiah prophesied of in the old testament. And when he preached the gospel first among the Corinthians, where there was a synagogue of the Jews, of whom some were converted, and became a part of that church; we read, *When Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ*^s. This was when he was at Corinth. And he did the same thing

^s Acts 18. 5.

before among the Thessalonians ; as you may see in the 17th chapter : *Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath-days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered, and have risen from the dead ; and that this Jesus whom I preach unto you, is Christ^t : this Jesus of Nazareth, he is the Messiah, that anointed one who is spoken of by so many dignifying characters in the old testament.*

Now the prophecy of the old testament was either express, or by typical representation : and in both these ways there was an account given of our Lord Jesus Christ under the most clear and distinguishing marks and characters. The types were a sort of prophecy ; they prefigur'd the coming of the Lord Jesus, and gave us an account of various things he was to do and suffer.

As for the express prophecies of the old testament, they are very numerous. There is an account of his wonderful and miraculous birth, *that a virgin should conceive a son^u* ; as the prophet Isaiah declares. There is an account of the place where he should be born, *that it should be in Bethlehem^v*. An account of the massacre of the infants there, on occasion of his birth, represented by *Rachel weeping for her children^w*. An account of his going into Egypt, and his re-

^t Acts 17. 3.

^u Isa. 7. 14.

^v Mich. 5. 2.

^w Jer. 31. 15.

turn from thence ; *out of Egypt have I called my Son* ^x. An account of the manner of his preaching ; *proclaiming liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison-doors to them that were bound* ^y. An account of the wonderful modesty and meekness of his behaviour : altho he was by office a king, yet that he should appear *meek and lowly, he should not cry aloud, nor make his voice to be heard in the streets* ^z ; not make any great noise, or shew any kind of ostentation ; but, on the contrary, should appear the most singular pattern of meekness and humility. As to many circumstances of his life, the prophets give us passages which sufficiently characterize him. But then as his crucifixion and sufferings are so very considerable, that the apostle makes the whole christian religion to center here, and shews that the preaching of the christian religion is to preach Christ crucified ; so all the particularities of his sufferings are, in a manner, foretold by the prophets : that he who *sat at table with him, should lift up his heel against him* ^a : that both Jews and Gentiles should persecute him ; *Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing ? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against his anointed* ^b. That he should be scoff'd at ;

^x Hof. 11. 1.

^y Isa. 61. 1.

^z Chap. 42. 2.

^a Psal. 41. 9.

^b Psal. 2. 1, 2.

that

that he should be buffeted ; that he should be exposed to various torments, and at last be crucified : as is foretold by the prophet *Isaiah*, in the 53d chapter of his prophecy ; and by *David* in the 22d Psalm. That he should be scourg'd ; *for by his stripes we must be healed* : that he should be spit upon ; *for he should not hide his face from shame and spitting* : that he should offer himself as a sacrifice ; *who was wounded for our transgressions, and broken for our sins*. That he should be lifted up and nailed to a cross ; as is represented by the psalmist, when he speaks of him as being rack'd, and his bones extended *that they stared upon him* : and when he speaks of *his hands and feet being pierced, while they laughed him to scorn and shook the head at him ; while they parted his garments amongst them, and cast lots on his vesture*. The same may be said concerning his resurrection, and his ascension into heaven. Most things, in short, which the apostles and evangelists have declared concerning him in the history they have given us of his life and death, as well as many things relating to the doctrines he preached, you will find spoken of in the prophetical part of the old testament.

Not only this, but there were various types which did eminently represent him : particularly that of the paschal lamb ; and the goat which was sacrificed, and the scape-goat which was sent into the wilderness on

the annual day of atonement. But it were endless for me to enumerate the many particulars wherein these, and other of those sacrifices which God instituted heretofore, typified the Messiah. The author to the Hebrews gives us an excellent account of this matter ; and explains the sense of the old testament at the same time that he confirms and proves the religion of the new.

Now when such proofs as these were produced by the apostle, it was very reasonable that the Jews, who believed the old testament to be the word of God, should yield to such arguments as these, seeing no person, but Jesus Christ, had ever appeared in the world to whom all these characters answered ; and seeing it was inconsistent with the design of God, in giving the word of prophecy in the old testament, to suffer any person to appear, to whom these characters should agree, but the true Messiah : for if these things had met in any other, it would have betrayed the most considerate persons into an unavoidable necessity of believing a falsehood.

And this, by the way, shews the unreasonable obstinacy of this people ; and particularly that they should stumble at the crucifixion of Christ, and be offended at the doctrine of the cross, when there are so many express prophecies which speak of the sufferings of the Messiah, which can't reasonably be applied to any other : and when that
cere-

ceremonial scheme, in which they are so well pleased, does but represent what our Lord Jesus was to perform, and what he was to suffer. 'Tis, moreover, a remarkable providence that this people, who have denied Jesus Christ notwithstanding the reasons which have been offered to engage them to believe in his name; that these harden'd people, I say, *upon whom wrath is come to the uttermost*^c, yet should retain so much conscience as to esteem the old testament as the word of God, and should so carefully and industriously keep the very book which condemns their obstinacy and unbelief, and contains sufficient arguments to prove Jesus to be the Messiah, at the same time that it foretels they would stumble and be offended at him.

But then another sort of argument which the apostles made use of to prove that Jesus was the Christ, was taken from the miracles of the new testament. It may be supposed that the former argument was sufficient; and one would have thought it might have been sufficient to the Jews, who believed the old testament to be the word of God. But the Gentiles, who were unacquainted with the Jewish religion, could not be convinced of the truth of the gospel this way, without first having it proved to them that the scriptures of the old testament were

^c 1 Thess. 2. 16.

the word of God, and then being made acquainted with the various prophecies, and taught to compare them with the life and doctrine and sufferings of the Messiah. And therefore for the planting of christianity the more speedily in the world, and likewise for leaving the Jews more inexcusable, God was pleased to add to this testimony of his word the testimony of miracles; and to set that seal to the truths of the gospel, and particularly to this, that Jesus was the true Messiah.

Miracles were performed by Christ himself. When he came to testify of himself, God bare witness to him that he was his Son; that his doctrine was true; that he was indeed the Messiah, as he pretended, seeing he was able to do so many wonderful works, which could never have been effected but by the divine power. And the apostles performed miracles likewise, to confirm the doctrine of Jesus Christ; which they preached both to the Jews and Gentiles.

As to the miracles of our blessed Saviour; they were very many, and they were very great, tho they made not such a pompous appearance as the Jews expected. They thought of a Messiah who should come as a temporal prince, to deliver them from their enemies, to destroy those enemies by fire from heaven; and to own the Jews to be his people in the exclusion of all others:

I

whereas

whereas our Lord comes meek and lowly ; he comes into the world in a mean condition, and performs his miracles among those poor and ignorant people who followed him, while the more eminent persons among the Jews disdained almost to inquire into the wonderful works he performed. Instead of destroying men, by miracle, in that way, he heals them ; and raises some even from the dead. His miracles were, however, as great as if they had made a more magnificent appearance : for is not as great power necessary to raise one from the dead, as to cause fire to descend from heaven ? Is there not as much power required to heal a person in a moment, whose nerves are contracted, and who has been impotent all his life-time and never been able to go ; is not this, I say, as great an effect of power, as for a numerous army to be destroyed after a miraculous manner ? or to be smitten by the hand of an angel in the night ? Our Lord Jesus performed many miracles, and those in the sight of abundance of people : four or five thousand people are too many witnesses to be called to behold a work of this kind, if it be not a true miracle. Did ever any impostor suppose that he could hide his art of legerdemain from the eyes of such multitudes of people, who must needs have attended with great curiosity ; especially when he came to establish a new doctrine amongst them ? As the miracles of our Lord were done in the

view of abundance of people ; so the things that he did were such of which men might receive an easy information by their senses, whether they were true or not. When there was so small a quantity of bread and fish, and so great a multitude to be fed, it was easily discernible, by the most ignorant persons, whether this bread and this fish was multiplied. These things every one could discern.

And the same may be said concerning the miracles which the apostles wrought. Some of them were wrought before a great number of witnesses : and of those who opposed the christian religion, some could not deny the facts ; and others were so convinced as to own the truth of christianity, which was confirmed by them. Nor is it to be supposed the gospel should have been likely to obtain in the world as it did, if the apostles had not had an extraordinary power from heaven to confirm what they said. When therefore our Lord said he was the Son of God, he performed miracles to prove it ; and when the apostles taught the same doctrine, they healed the sick, raised the dead, and performed miracles, that there might be no room for any one reasonably to doubt. Nay, these miracles not only carried an incontestable evidence on the minds of those in whose view they were performed ; but the greatest enemies of christianity, in ages after the time of Christ and his apostles, have

have been forced to confess that many wonderful works were done by him and them. Tho they have denied the truths which they preached, yet they have acknowledged that many marvellous things were done by them. But it is sufficient proof that that man speaks from God who is able to confirm by miracles, as well as by prophecies, the truth he asserts: and this was done by the apostles, when they proved that Jesus was the Christ.

2. They treated of his crucifixion, not only by giving an historical account of the sufferings of our Lord Jesus, but explaining the doctrines which are founded upon the death of the cross. This was another part of their work; and indeed it was necessary to give an account of his sufferings, to shew that when they were compared with the prophecies and types of the old testament, they were an evident proof that our Lord Jesus was the true Christ. And, moreover, the extraordinary doctrines which were to be divulged to the world, as founded upon the cross of Christ; I say, those extraordinary doctrines which men had not heard of before, at least so clearly explained to them; these could not be proposed in a proper manner without giving an account of the history of the cross. Besides, there are so many things in the sufferings of our Lord capable of exciting the affections of men, especially when they consider the de-

sign and end of them, and what principle of kindness and compassion brought him from heaven to lay down his life in such a manner for us; that these made up an extraordinary motive to engage men to embrace the gospel.

I shall only give you an account in general of the historical part of the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ. I say, in general: because indeed all his sufferings, thro' the whole course of his life, may be called his cross; as that is a term used in scripture to express a suffering state. 'Tis the cross of Christ we are to take up in conformity to him^d, when we expose ourselves to any manner of suffering. Tho he was *a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief^e*, thro' the whole course of his life; the clouds grew thicker when he approached the time of his death. And 'tis this the apostles in a special manner insisted on. It was of great importance frequently to recommend his life to us as the most excellent pattern: but his death, in a special manner, gave occasion to explain the great truths of the gospel. The apostles, Peter and John, and Paul, when they address themselves to the Jews, with how much boldness do they represent to them the greatness of their crime, in *cru- cifying the Lord of life and glory^f*? And in what severe terms do they describe the

^d Mark 8. 34.

^e Isa. 53. 3.

^f Acts 2. 23, 24, 32. ch. 3.

15.

barbarity

barbarity of the fact ; telling them, that *by* cruel and *wicked hands* they had murdered him ? They preached therefore the doctrine of the cross, by representing to the people that Jesus of Nazareth, *sent of God, mighty in word and deed*, was pleased to expose himself to suffer a most ignominious and painful death. We may be sure they explained to them the several circumstances of his death, and the great aggravations of his sufferings ; for we find that in their writings they speak to the same purpose : that a person so great should veil his deity ; that he who was *the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person**, should be a man in all things, sin only excepted ; should have all things truly human, and be put into so low a condition ; be born in so obscure a place, and live after so mean manner as to be obliged to the charity of some good women for his sustenance ; and not have so kind a treatment in the world as the fowls of the air and the beasts of the field had : for the *foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests ; but the Son of man had not where to lay his head*^h.

To be sure they represented the greatness of his sufferings as well as the various circumstances of them. No doubt they described the sorrow and anguish of his mind when he was retired in the garden, as well as when

* Heb. 1. 3.

| ^h Mat. 8. 20.

he became a public spectacle upon the cross : that it should please the Father to wound him, to bruise him, to put him to grief before his enemies apprehended him : that he should be betrayed by one of his disciples, abjured by another, and forsaken by the rest. That he should be persecuted by those who were under such strong obligations to respect and honour him, because he had performed so many miracles among them ; and because he had first offered to them the terms of peace and reconciliation : that he should *come to his own, and his own not receive him*ⁱ, but reject him as if he had been an impostor. That he should be accused of the highest crimes, as if he had been guilty of a treasonable design against Cesar : as if he had been an impostor, and went about to cheat men of their souls : as if he had been a blasphemer, and so had deserved the highest punishment imaginable. That he should be accused by witnesses suborned to that purpose. That he should be apprehended like a malefactor in the night, with swords and staves : that he should be arraigned at the bar of the Jews and of the Gentiles : that he should be condemned, tho the heathen governor was persuaded he was an innocent man. That he should suffer so much reproach and ignominy, when his regal dignity was mock'd and derided ; and the rude

ⁱ John 1. 11.

soldiers addressed themselves to him as to a king only in scorn, having clothed him with a purple robe, and crowned him with thorns, and put a reed into his hand instead of a sceptre. That he should be exposed to the most ignominious death, that of the cross, the death of common malefactors, those who had been guilty of the highest crimes, the death of slaves, a death to which freemen were not exposed. That he should suffer that death, which was reckoned not only the most shameful, but accursed. That he should endure so much pain and torment in the various parts of his body, and particularly in those parts which were most nervous, his hands, and his feet. That he should be so long in dying, die a lingering death, loaded with so many sorrows and afflictions; and amidst his agonies behold the people mocking him, shaking their heads, and moving their lips in a disdainful manner, tho he was suffering for their offences, and praying for their forgiveness, and shedding his blood to purge those consciences which were polluted by spilling it.

Thus the apostles, we may suppose, preached the doctrine of the cross, representing the history of our Saviour's sufferings, with the various aggravations which attended them; the torments of his body, and the sorrows of his mind. But I proposed to treat of this only in the general.

They

They also represented what were the doctrines founded upon the crucifixion of our Saviour, and which had a relation to it. 'Tis very evident, that the chief intention of the sufferings of our Lord was to make atonement for sin : *Behold the Lamb of God, says John the baptist, who taketh away the sin of the world*^k. Tho his death was very exemplary, and tho we are exhorted to follow his example, and to be conformed to him so far as to be crucified with him, to die to sin, and to exercise faith and patience, meekness and resignation under the greatest sufferings, as he did ; yet the great design of his death was *to make himself an offering for our sins*^l, *to bear our sins in his own body on the tree, that by his stripes we might be healed*^m. This is abundantly evident from the manner the apostles took in expressing their sense of the sufferings of Christ in their epistles, as well as by the account we have of their preaching in the history of the Acts.

With relation therefore to Christ's crucifixion ; they spake of his person as the Son of God : so the author to the Hebrews shews us the efficacy of his sacrifice, because he was so great a person, whom the angels are required to worship, and who *made the worlds*ⁿ. They took occasion, in explaining his crucifixion, to shew the greatness of the divine grace and love, the principle from

^k John 1. 29.^l Isa. 53. 10.^m 1 Pet. 2. 24.ⁿ Heb. 1.

whence

whence all this flowed ; that *God did not spare his Son* °, but gave him to die for us : the love of Christ, in that he did not spare himself, nor refuse to make himself an oblation for our sins, but voluntarily offered himself to the death of the cross. They explained to them the nature of this sacrifice, both with regard to the satisfaction made by it for sin, and the appeasing the divine wrath, that we should be saved from everlasting misery ; and also in its being meritorious, to procure for us the favour of God, so that we should be enrich'd with the privilege of grace here, and the glory which is to be revealed hereafter. They explained from hence the necessity of repealing the legal institution of the old testament, I mean the ceremonial part of that institution ; because Christ, *by one offering, hath for ever perfected them that are sanctified* ^p : for, as the author to the Hebrews well argues, there was *no need of another sacrifice, when once a perfect one was come* ^q. From hence the apostles took occasion to explain also the necessity of Christ's resurrection, seeing he had made atonement for our sins by so excellent a sacrifice ; the bands of death were not capable of holding him ; therefore he was raised from the dead, and appeared to many of his disciples : which was, by the way, another great confirmation of the truth of the christian religion.

° Rom. 8. 32.

^p Heb. 10. 14.

| ^q Chap. 9.

As he died for our offences, so they shewed the people he was raised again for our justification^r. His ascension likewise was shewn from hence ; for what should hinder his being an intercessor, after having offered a perfect sacrifice ? And the consequence hereof was the blessing of the people, which was another part of the priestly office ; and our Lord poured forth the spirit *to bless the people, by turning them from their iniquities*^t : by which again he confirmed the truth of his holy religion. For that miraculous appearance of cloven tongues of fire, which sat upon the apostles, and the miraculous gift of tongues which was continued some time amongst them, and amongst many of those who were brought over to the christian institution ; these, as they depended upon our Lord's crucifixion, so were a confirmation of the acceptance of his sacrifice, seeing he was admitted into heaven, and these great and glorious events followed. They explained from hence the necessity of his coming again to judgment ; for God had promised, that *if he should make his soul an offering for sin, he should divide the spoil with the great and with the strong*^s, and that he should be the judge of the world : for there are various prophecies which speak of his kingdom as an everlasting kingdom ; and therefore he must give the final and decisive judg-

^r Rom. 4. 25.^t Acts 3. 26.^s Isa. 53. 12.

ment at the last. This was to be argued likewise from the success of his priesthood, as well as from the dignity of his person: and so the author to the Hebrews reasons; and having proved Christ a priest, shews him a king, and therefore *a priest after the order of Melchizedek* †, who was both a king and a priest.

So that all the doctrines of our holy religion have a near connection with this of Christ's crucifixion; as I might explain to you, if I went into many particulars. And not only so, but the moral part of christianity also depends hereupon: for we have not only an example of the exercise of the greatest virtues in the sufferings of our blessed Saviour, who suffered with so much meekness and patience and resignation, and who believed so firmly at a time when he was deserted in some sense, and therefore cried out, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me* ‡? but this doctrine of the crucifixion of our Saviour shews us also the exceeding sinfulness of sin; shews us how God is displeased with it; that his own Son must be sacrificed rather than sin must go unpunished; as well as gives the greatest example of the divine love, and sets before us the most excellent motive to engage us to a becoming obedience; that rather than we should perish for ever, he would be at the expence of

† Heb. 7. 17.

‡ Mat. 27. 46.

the blood of his only begotten Son. And in like manner there is a wonderful encouragement given to attempt the practice of virtue and holiness, notwithstanding that reluctancy which we naturally find in ourselves, and the many attempts which have been made to no purpose by us; in that this doctrine directs us to seek to *the author and finisher of our faith* ^v, for all grace necessary to enable us to mortify the deeds of the body. He has merited that grace which can give a strange and surprizing turn to our souls; which can *turn us from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God* ^w: besides that our Saviour has given us, by his own words, and by his apostles, the most extraordinary and exact scheme of morality and holiness, and has laid his own charge upon us, that we should make ourselves known to be his disciples by doing his commands ^x; and to be his friends by conforming ourselves to his will ^y.

Thus did the apostles *preach Jesus Christ as crucified*; and thereupon explain'd all the doctrines of religion, and press'd and inculcated the duties of it. And not only the moral duties, but those of a positive nature have a dependance upon the cross of Christ: for what does our baptism signify but our *burial with Christ*, and our *resurrection with him* in a moral sense, as well

^v Heb. 12. 2.

^w Acts 26. 18.

^x John 15. 8, 9, 10.

^y Ver. 14.

as it represents our Saviour's burial and resurrection, which supposes his death? And it is also easy to observe, that the Lord's supper very expressly sets before us Jesus Christ crucified. But,

3. Another thing to be considered in the apostles preaching, and that wherein all the ministers of the gospel are to imitate them, is, the offer and proposal of salvation to all who shall believe and entertain it. They are to declare to men that these truths are to be believed: that *Jesus is the Christ*, and that he has suffered for sinners; that he who was crucified is become lord and king, being raised from the dead and ascended into heaven; and that whoever believeth in his name, shall have everlasting life. This faith indeed does not consist only in believing those propositions which I have mentioned, that Jesus is the Messiah, that he was crucified, that such doctrines founded upon his cross are true, and that he offers salvation to sinners: but we are to accept of this offer and proposal which is made in his word; else we cannot, in the sense of the holy scripture, be said to believe in his name. And therefore faith is explained frequently by obedience, for it comprehends that in it. *To believe*, and *obey the gospel*, are spoken of as terms of like importance. *To believe the gospel**, is an act of obedience; for this is the will of God,

* 2 Thess. 1. 8. 1 Pet. 4. 17.

and *this his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son*^a. So that to believe in Jesus Christ as the Messiah, as the Mediator, is not only to believe the truths which are revealed in his sacred word, of which we may be convinced by such testimonies as have been mentioned; but to resign up ourselves to his conduct, to be his disciples, his followers; to imitate his example, and to conform ourselves to his precepts; to be like him, so as to be *crucified with Christ*, as the apostle speaks, in *dying to sin, and walking in newness of life*^b; to own him as our Lord and king, and subject ourselves to his conduct and government; to be willing to do what he requires to be done by us, and to suffer whatsoever his providence shall expose us to, for the sake of truth and righteousness. And whoever thus effectually *believes in the Son of God*, and believes the foundation truths of the christian religion, the cross of Christ, the design of his sufferings, and the great points which are founded thereupon; whosoever heartily believes these, so as to comply with the terms which are laid down in the sacred word, shall, as certainly as God is true, be saved: for there is the word of God, and his oath to assure such of salvation; *two immutable things*, says the apostle to the Hebrews, *wherein it is impossible for God to lye*^c.

^a 1 John 3. 23.

^b Rom. 6. 2, 4.

^c Heb. 6. 18.

Thus have I pass'd thro' what I propos'd at this time, concerning the doctrine of Jesus Christ crucified. In giving you this summary account of it, you may easily take notice of the reasonableness of believing that it is true ; and, if it be true, of the importance of complying with the terms propos'd. And that application I leave you to make to your own souls ; and the other part of our text to another opportunity.



M 2 S E R-



S E R M O N V.

Preach'd at

S P I T T L E - F I E L D S , June 30, 1700.

I C O R. i. 23, 24.

But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

The second S E R M O N on this text.



P R O C E E D now to the second thing proposed from these words; which is,

II. To discourse of the prejudices which the generality of men entertained against this doctrine of Christ crucified. And here are named two sorts of people; Jews and Greeks, *i. e.* Jews and Gentiles: and their prejudices are represented to us in two words; it was *a stumbling-block to the Jews,*

Jews, and it was *foolishness to the Greeks*. The Jews distinguished themselves from the rest of the world by calling the Gentiles in general Greeks; because the Gentiles, who were most known to them, were Greeks. For in the time that the Grecian monarchy had the ascendant in the world, the Jews were dispersed into divers Greek cities; and therefore their conversation among the Greeks, made them call all Gentiles by their name. As the Greeks distinguished themselves from other men, by calling them Barbarians; so the Jews distinguished themselves from the Gentiles, by calling the Gentiles Greeks. The Greeks called all other nations Barbarians, because learning flourished most eminently amongst themselves; and the Jews called all Gentiles Greeks, because the greatest part of the Gentiles, with whom they had converse, were Greeks. And thus we find, by the use of the word in the new testament, that it signifies Gentiles in general: *I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ*, says the apostle to the Romans, *for 'tis the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek*^d.

As for the Jews, it may be thought strange that they should reject the doctrine of Christ crucified; that they should oppose his person and his ministration; that he should *come to his own*, and yet *his own should not receive him*^e. For they were persons who made the

^d Rom. 1. 16.

| ^e John 1. 11.

most eminent profession of religion of any people in the world; and they had the greatest privileges and advantages for that purpose. They had been long expecting the Messiah; they had many prophecies which described him, and many types which prefigured him; they pretended to wait for *the consolation of Israel*, to long for his coming; and yet these rejected him, these stumbled at him when he came. Our Saviour appeared amongst them, and they were capable of making the most strict and accurate examination of his doctrine, and of his miracles; they could hear him preach, and they could see the miracles which he wrought, and inquire particularly concerning such as were done by his disciples; and yet these people stumbled at him.

Then as for the Greeks, they were the most polite people amongst the Gentiles; and if they rejected him, what appearance was there that ever his doctrine should obtain in the world? The Greeks were an understanding people, and had advanced learning to a very great height at this time, when the doctrine of the cross was first preached. It was the most polite age that ever had been in the world; arts and sciences were improved very much; philosophy was in great reputation and esteem; and there were abundance of the Greeks who made it their business to be continually hammering out truth, as they thought, by disputations and
subtle

subtle inquiries. Divers of their philosophers had great numbers of disciples who followed them; and so natural reason was improved and advanced considerably. The Greeks had other advantages: for, by the conversation of so many Jews amongst them, as you find there were Jews in all the Greek cities which had their synagogues; I say, the Greeks had a great advantage, by that means, to inform themselves of what the scriptures of the old testament had said, and to compare this with the doctrine, with the life, with the death, and with the miracles of the Messiah: besides, having had the scriptures of the old testament translated into Greek before this time, they had in this a much greater advantage, by having an easy access to the oracles of God. And yet these people, with all their wisdom and reason, with all their advantages of one kind and another, rejected the gospel, despised it, laughed at it, and counted it foolishness: it was *a stumbling-block to the Jews, and to the Greeks foolishness.*

But let us consider the difference that is here made betwixt their prejudices: 'tis said to have been *a stumbling-block to the Jews,* but *foolishness to the Greeks.*

A stumbling-block to the Jews. This term is taken from the 8th chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah, wherein is represented the sad condition of that people by reason of their opposing the gospel. At the 13th verse,

says the prophet, *Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.* Ver. 14. *And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling, and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin, and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.* Ver. 15. *And many among them shall stumble and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken.* Christ, who is represented as the foundation and corner-stone of his church, upon whose person and doctrine they and their faith are built, is a *stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence* to those who oppose the doctrine of his cross; and so he proved to the Jews. This metaphorical term seems to represent them as being in the way of truth. *What advantage hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way; chiefly because that unto them were committed the oracles of Godⁱ: theirs was the covenant, the fathers, and the promises.* As they were in expectation of the Messiah, and were most likely to embrace him when he came; he spends his life with them, and yet they stumble at him. They are stopp'd in their progress, notwithstanding the advance some of them seem to have made, and the expectation they had of his coming, and of the improvement of religion thereby. They are stopp'd in their progress; and not only so, but they fall: *they stumble and fall,*

ⁱ Rom. 3. 1, 2.

and are snared and taken; as the prophet says. They are so offended at him, and treat him after such a manner, that not only do they stumble at Christ, and so fall desperately; but he declares, that as he was a stumbling-stone to them, by reason of their prejudices against him, that *stone would fall upon them and grind them to powder*². As they despised him, and were offended at him; so he would execute his judgments upon them.

But what was it they stumbled at in a particular manner?

Why, they stumbled at the gospel, because it wanted *power*, as they supposed. This is evident from the context, as well as from the text itself: says the text, *Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God.* Tho the Greeks count it foolishness, 'tis *the wisdom of God*; and tho the Jews stumble at it, 'tis *the power of God*. So ver. 25. *The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.* What in religion men count *foolishness* and *weakness*, is *power* and *wisdom*: and this power surpasses all theirs, notwithstanding what they suppose; and this wisdom surpasses theirs, tho they are pleased to call it foolishness. Now they meant by *power*, authority, reputation, wealth, pomp and magnificence; all those things which make a great appear-

² Mat. 21. 44.

ance of power amongst men, and advance any thing in the view of the world. For riches and honour furnish men with power, and make them capable of doing much more than they otherwise could in human societies. They, therefore, the Jews, stumbled at the gospel, because it did not appear attended with that pomp and splendor, with that external glory, and supported with human authority; because the great and the noble, the wise and the rich, did not entertain it. And this is evident from what the apostle speaks afterwards in the 26th verse: *For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. Ver. 27. But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty. Ver. 28. And base things, and things which are despised, hath God chosen; yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are. Ver. 29. That no flesh should glory in his presence.*

Now here we may inquire, in what respects they thought this doctrine of the gospel, by the ministry of our Lord and his apostles, wanted *power*. And this will appear by shewing what power they expected and desired; and then, that the doctrine of the cross seem'd to want this great advantage, which would have been likely to make it gain reputation amongst men.

You

You may easily know what sort of power it was which they desired, when you consider,

1. That they were a people, establish'd as a church, by wonderful signs and miracles, *by a mighty hand and out-stretched arm.* God brought them out of Egypt after many terrible plagues were executed upon the Egyptians: the sea parted for them, and then returned upon their enemies; and *there was a cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night,* to conduct them thro' the wilderness. God was pleased to manifest himself to them, after a most awful manner, upon mount Sinai, with thunder and lightning, and the voice of a trumpet; an audible voice from heaven pronouncing the law of the ten commandments. They were fed forty years with manna in the wilderness, and they were supplied with water out of the rock after a miraculous manner. They were introduced into Canaan with great signs and attestations of the divine power; and, upon various occasions, in the times of the prophets, miracles were renewed amongst them: fire came down from heaven to destroy those who went to take the prophet Elijah^h: an angel slew an hundred fourscore and five thousand who were besieging Jerusalem, all in one nightⁱ. Divers such things as these had been wrought amongst them: therefore they expected that

^h 2 Kings 1,

|| ⁱ Chap. 19. 35.

in the days of the Messiah they should see such kind of miracles as these were, perhaps miracles which would make a more magnificent and glorious appearance than these: but, however, such a kind of miracles they waited for.

2. The *power* which they expected in the time of the Messiah, was agreeable to those external promises of temporal blessings God gave them under that lower dispensation of the old testament. Spiritual blessings were couched indeed under temporal promises: but the Jews, in a special manner, and almost only, look'd after temporal things; to be delivered from the hands of their enemies; to become victorious over them; to be secure from their incroachments; *to be the head, and not the tail*; to lend to other nations, and not to borrow of them; to have *five of them to chase an hundred, and an hundred to put ten thousand to flight*^{*}. These were the promises which were proposed to them for their obedience to God; and they expected in the days of the Messiah they should be the most prosperous and victorious people in the world. So they interpreted that text; *The morning comes, and also the night*[†]. "In the morning of the Messiah it will be a bright and a glorious day to us Jews, but a gloomy night upon the rest of the inhabitants of the world." They hoped

^{*} Lev. 26. 8, Deut. 28. | [†] Isa. 21. 12.

to be a nation of princes, kings, and priests. In regard of temporal grandeur and majesty, their expectations were very great; and therefore you may easily imagine they objected against the gospel for want of this power.

3. They had many prophecies concerning the Messiah, which, under the covert of great temporal advantages, speak of spiritual blessings; or else had reference unto that glorious state of the church which is to be expected at the appearance of our Lord, when he comes *the second time without sin unto salvation*^m; therefore overlooking the coming of the Messiah the first time, when he was to appear in a mean and despicable condition, in order to be a sacrifice for sin; and having their fancies full of those glorious descriptions which are in the old testament concerning the prosperity and victory of our Lord Jesus Christ; they were wonderfully disappointed to find one pretend to be the Messiah, who lived in such poor and low circumstances, and told them he must undergo the death of the cross. These three things shew us what a sort of power it was they expected.

But then let us, in the next place, consider particularly what it was they were prejudiced against in this account concerning our blessed Saviour. And it was almost at every thing; at his person, at his followers, at his miracles, at his doctrine, and at his proposals.

^m Heb. 9. 28.

They were prejudiced against his person, because he did not appear to descend from parents who were in great circumstances in the world; persons of great honour and reputation, of great wealth and substance. They therefore object to him that he was *the carpenter's son*, and that his relations were a mean sort of people. They were shock'd at the manner of his education; imagining that he could not be liberally educated, or be well bred, who descended of such parents. What reputation, what power, what authority can be pretended to by such a man as this, so born and so educated? They were prejudiced even against the place of his habitation, because he dwelt at Nazareth; this being a despicable place, to a proverb: *Can any good thing come out of Nazareth* ⁿ?

They were prejudiced also at the people who followed him, and took them to be a very mob: *Have any of the rulers believed on him? But this ignorant people, who know not the law, are accursed* ^o. They were prejudiced against his apostles; that he should call those to be nearest him, who were persons of so mean a condition, poor fishermen, who forsook their nets to follow him. Are these the princes, thought they, the princes who must be nearest the person of the Messiah? And does he seem to appear accord-

ⁿ John i. 46.

I : Chap. 7. 48, 49.

ing to the description we have had of the Messiah, when he has such mean followers as these are, persons of no consideration in the world, but poor, ignorant, illiterate people?

They were prejudiced against his miracles too, as if there was power wanting in them, because he did not *make the sun stand still*, or *go back*; because he did not cause violent storms of hail to destroy their enemies; because he did not bring the plagues of Egypt upon those who had them under their yoke; and because he did not call for *fire from heaven* to consume those who opposed his doctrine: therefore, say they, here's a defect of *power*; whereas wonderful things were done in the times of Moses and the prophets.

They were prejudiced in like manner against the doctrine of his crucifixion. They could by no means understand what need there was for the Messiah to be crucified: and the very disciples of our Lord Jesus, as they were prone to desire *that fire might come down from heaven*^p, and consume their adversaries; so they cry, *This be far from thee, Lord*^q, when he speaks of *suffering*. They were so tinctur'd with the prejudices of the Jews, that they could not think it suitable to the grandeur of the Messias to expose himself to any sort of death; much

^p Luke 9. 54.

^q Mat. 16. 22.

less to the ignominious death of the cross. The Jews were likewise prejudiced against the doctrine of the cross, in that they supposed our Lord Jesus Christ so impotent that he could not *save himself*^r, and so imagined he could not save sinners. How can the doctrine of the cross save sinners? how can they be saved by this man when he could not save himself?

They were prejudiced likewise against the proposal of the terms of the gospel, after the manner in which the apostles delivered it, according to our Saviour's commission. As they thought it a mean and a weak thing for the Messiah to expose himself to be crucified; so they thought it unbecoming his greatness and dignity to send his gospel to the Gentiles, and that they should come into fellowship with the Jews; that they should be *fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God*^r, and should come in for equal privileges with them. This they thought intolerable: and therefore when the apostle speaks of his call *to go to the Gentiles*, they have no more patience, but cry out, *Away with him; it is not fit that such a man should live*^s. So much envy prevailed over their minds, that they could not endure to think any should be the people of God but their nation; or at least if any were entertained, they should be such as were profe-

^r Luke 23. 35.^r Eph. 2. 19.^s Acts 22. 22.

lyted to them by partaking of their ceremonies. They were therefore prejudiced against the doctrine of the gospel; they thought it would rather become the grandeur of the Messiah to advance them than to publish salvation to the Gentiles. This was a sort of levelling doctrine, they thought, which could not tend to their advantage: while the Gentiles were to have the gospel published to them as well as the Jews, they forgot the importance of it to themselves; and rather chose to reject the blessings it proposed to them, than that the poor Gentiles should share with them therein: so much were they press'd with the passion of envy. Thus did they accuse the gospel with want of power: there was in the doctrine of Christ crucified no glorious and reputable appearance, as they thought.

Lastly, as the Jews stumbled at the extent of the proposal of salvation to the Gentiles, so likewise at the manner of the proposal; the very terms on which salvation was offered to sinners, which are faith in Christ, and true repentance and holiness.

Let us now consider the Greeks, what it was they meant by *wisdom*; what it was made them expect wisdom in any doctrine which should be proposed to their acceptance; and in what respects they were prejudiced against the gospel, supposing it to be defective on this account, that it wanted wisdom. They counted it mere foolishness,

folly in the abstract, a most ridiculous thing. What then was the wisdom they made such an account of?

Why, sometimes by wisdom is understood the knowledge of the truth, and reason of things : sometimes is meant a practical improvement hereof in the course of life ; and then 'tis called prudence : and sometimes this prudence is concerned not only in the government of a man's own life, but in the laying of measures and projects for public advantage, and for the welfare of mankind.

The Greeks had mightily improved learning, as was observed before. Philosophy was in great vogue and reputation amongst them : and therefore they pretended to abundance of wisdom in the first sense, knowledge in the nature and reason of things ; that they knew how to think, and how to judge ; how to compare things amongst themselves, and how to infer from them after such a manner as to avoid the errors which the generality of mankind fell into.

They likewise pretended to a great deal of prudence, to instruct men in the way of happiness ; to seek their own welfare and advantage, as every man naturally desires : they gave schemes therefore of religion and morality, to shew men how to govern and conduct themselves in order to be happy. And moral philosophy was of great esteem among them.

They exercised their prudence likewise in managing this design of gaining disciples, and persuading men to come into their way, by using a great many terms of art, much subtlety of reasoning, and the pomp of eloquence. They had so far studied human nature, as to understand that this was likely to give their doctrine a great reputation in the world. It was this sort of wisdom therefore which they expected and inquired after. And they had abundance of curiosity, as appears by the account we have of the apostle's coming to Athens; *every one was inquiring after some new thing*^t: and so they were willing to hear the doctrine of the apostle, tho they presently rejected it.

They were curious about some new scheme of religion; and when christianity was proposed to them, they expected something which should be managed very subtly, with a specious appearance of argument and reason, and with a magnificent shew of rhetorick: some extraordinary eloquence they expected in the apostle, whom they soon reproach'd as *a babbler*^u. This was the wisdom they inquired after; they wanted to be entertained with fine speculations, and every thing to be proved only by the reason of things, and an appeal to be made to their understandings: and, so far as things could be beat out with mere dint of reason, they

^t Acts 17. 21.| ^u Ver. 18.

would be willing to attend ; but to tell them of the testimonies of the old testament, to bring the holy scripture to prove the doctrine of the Messiah, or to tell them of being saved by the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ ; to tell them of these things, seem'd foolish : it seem'd ridiculous to pretend that men could be made happy this way ; whereas they thought it was the way to make them most miserable. If you consider the matter particularly, you will find these must needs have been their prejudices.

Tho the apostles spake as to rational creatures, and never pretended to impose any thing upon the world without proof ; yet if men would seek proofs for the doctrine of our Lord Jesus Christ, it must be by first considering his person, whether he was the true Messias or not : or if the nature of the thing required it, they must be sent to the testimonies of the old testament. Besides, when the apostles discoursed to them concerning the future state, the doctrine of salvation by the cross of Christ ; why, these are things which they had never heard of among their philosophers ; these were *things that eye had not seen, nor ear heard, nor had they entered into the heart of man*^v ; as the apostle says in the following chapter : and therefore they are despised as foolish and ridiculous things. As if a thing may not be proved to be true when God has revealed

^v 1 Cor. 2. 9.

it, and shewn us the truth of it by prophecy and by miracle : as if these were not to be believed as well as any notion which we may be convinced of by rational arguments, from the nature of the things we know.

Another thing which prejudiced them against the doctrine of Christ, was, because they thought it a foolish scheme to lead men to happiness. They thought there needed not a sacrifice and a priest of such dignity : they counted it foolish to imagine that God should be made man, that he should dwell amongst us, and that he should expose himself to the death of the cross. They counted it a foolish project, to put men upon hopes of happiness by the righteousness and obedience of another : a foolish project, to give them the hopes of a resurrection and rewards in another life, while it put them upon exposing themselves to all manner of reproach and persecution in this. Their way of leading men to happiness was to teach them so to govern and regulate their passions as to render themselves agreeable to human society ; to have a regard to the health of their bodies, and preserve themselves temperate : and at the same time they allowed them to think as highly as they pleased of themselves. The Stoics boasted of their self-sufficiency, making this their honour, that they were as so many gods, able to command and govern themselves, and to be happy in spite of all external attacks. And

they carried on this diffimulation so far, that when they must needs have felt abundance of pain, they would not confess it to be an evil. The Epicureans placed happiness in the enjoyment of a man's self. The Platonists used many pompous words to express their high speculations; and entertained and amused their own minds, and those of their disciples, with abundance of subtle fancies. All of them, in general, accounted morality, and a man's governing himself, to be true happiness. They had very obscure notions of another world: and therefore for the apostles to talk of future rewards and punishments, and that they must expose themselves here to pains and torments for the sake of religion, upon the hopes of a future state of glory; this they could by no means think was prudent. This was all foolishness: therefore they disapproved of the scheme and project of the gospel, and judg'd it very ill-contriv'd to make the truths which it proposed obtain in the world. They thought if there was truth in the things themselves, there was the most impolitick way imaginable made use of for the advancement of it. These philosophers had something to entertain men withal; for they conformed themselves to the humours of the times, to the superstition and idolatry of the several nations where they lived. Their business was to be complaisant to the world, and to address themselves to mankind with excellency
of

of speech, and with great appearance of argument and subtlety of reason. They therefore obtained amongst persons of great rank and character in the world; and themselves were called *the princes of this world*^w. They obtained mightily upon mankind by their eloquence, and by their pretended reason; so that many princes turned philosophers, so great a veneration had they for them. It was very likely therefore that what they proposed, with all these politick advantages, should prevail.

But what was the scheme of planting christianity in the world by the apostles? Instead of being attended with any of these arts and subtleties, in order to render it successful, it will not so much as allow men the indulgence of one darling vice; not so much as pride and revenge, which prevailed greatly among the philosophers. On the contrary, christianity exposed its converts to persecution for the sake of Christ; it declared that *every one who would be his disciple, must take up his cross and follow him*^x. What was there in the doctrine of christianity which should make it take, when it proposed such strict morals, and so much humility withal, so much self-denial; and declared, that the followers of it must expect tribulation? The Greeks therefore thought this folly and madness, and despised and rejected it accordingly.

^w 1 Cor. 2, 6.

^x Luke 14. 27.
N 4

Besides,

Besides, the persons who were employed in this work, they thought were altogether incapable to bring a thing of this nature about : a company of illiterate men to publish such things ; men without reputation, without wealth, and so unable to engage any in their interest : without force and authority ; nay, who must expect all the powers of the world to be combined against them. *The preaching of Christ* therefore *was foolishness* : this they thought was to defeat their own purpose, and it was impossible to establish such a religion after such a manner ; without money, without arms, without reputation, without the authority of princes, without so much as the common people on their side : a religion which opposed all the darling corruptions which men are so willing to indulge ; and which proposed to its converts, at their first embracing it, that they must *take up their cross and follow Christ* : this they thought an unlikely project to take in the world.

Having given you this account of the prejudices of the Jews and the Greeks against the christian religion, I shall now briefly treat of the last thing ; and shew you,

III. That *to those who are called*, to those few who entertained the doctrine of the gospel, it appeared with quite another face ; *it was to them the power of God, and the wisdom of God.*

The

The prejudices of Jews and Greeks were not sufficient to engage the minds of all persons: some there were so attentive to the doctrines of the gospel, some considered the nature of it so well, and the proofs of it appeared to them so strong, and the doctrines so reasonable, that they found themselves disposed to embrace it. These are said to have been called: *To those who are called.*

Sometimes in the scripture those are said to be *called* to whom the doctrine of christianity is published: *Many are called, but few chosen*^y. *Many are called*; that is, have the gospel published to them. Sometimes it signifies those who have embraced the gospel when published to them: *Those*, says the apostle, *whom he did predestinate, them he also called*^z. So here, *those who are called*, that is, who have embraced the doctrine of the gospel, who are called to the dignity of christians, to the privileges and advantages of the state of christianity; who are called out of the world, effectually separated from the world, and from amongst men; those who are truly converted, true christians; to them the gospel appears to be both *the power of God, and the wisdom of God.*

It appears to be *the power of God*, notwithstanding all the prejudices of the Jews: for they discern the same glory and dignity in our Lord Jesus Christ, however he appeared

^y Mat. 20. 16.

| ^z Rom. 8. 30.

meanly in the world : they consider that he is no less God, in assuming human nature from a low and a mean family, than if he had taken it in the family of a prince ; for all mankind are of the same mould, and human nature is in itself the same. They consider that this is the way to advance the glory of God so much the more : and therefore, tho for a time our Saviour's power was obscured, it was agreeable to the wisdom of God it should be so. So much the more did the power of God appear in his ministry, if he had not a liberal education : so much the more wonderful was it that he should reason after so excellent a manner at twelve years of age in the temple ; and that without human advantages he should *grow* in such a manner *in wisdom*, as well as *in favour with God and man*^a.

If our Saviour's followers were mean and contemptible, does not *the excellency of the power appear the more to be of God*^b ? That the doctrine of the cross of Christ should prevail upon the most uncultivated sort of men, publicans and sinners ; those who, by a custom of sinning, had been habituated to it ; that they should be brought to the obedience of Christ, when the politer sort of men, and those who made a greater profession of religion, remained obstinate : did not the power of God hereby appear so much

^a Luke 2. 52.| ^b 2 Cor. 4. 7.

the more? Did it not appear the more, in Christ's promoting his religion by such men as his apostles, than if he had employed the greatest princes upon earth to advance it? What reason then to be shock'd at the gospel for wanting power, because he called such mean people to be his apostles? And was there not as much power in casting out devils, and raising the dead; as much power exerted as formerly, in causing fire to come down from heaven, or in making the sun stand still, or in sending armies of locusts and flies to destroy a nation? Was there not as much power, and abundantly more mercy and grace hereby manifested to the world? And accordingly the wisdom of God concurred with this power, in ordering it so that the miracles of our blessed Saviour should be of such a nature as to discover the design of his mission, and the grace of the gospel, as well as to shew his mighty power. There was no want of power in our blessed Saviour, tho he was crucified in weakness. What a power over his own mind, that he could forgive his enemies while he was bleeding by their merciless hands? God is said to be *great in power*^c, when his mercy is spoken of; as amongst men, 'tis a sign a man has a wonderful power over himself when he can pass by resentments, and shew kindness to those who have injured him. And does not the power of God appear upon this ac-

^c Nahum 1. 3.

count? as Moses says; *Let the power of my Lord now be great, in forgiving the sin of his people*^d. Did not the power of our Saviour appear likewise at his resurrection, which was the consequence of his crucifixion? He was *raised with power*^e; *declared to be the Son of God with power, by his resurrection from the dead*^f. Did not his power appear in ordering the gospel to be published to the world? He shew'd his authority in giving commission; and his power over the souls of men in rendering it prosperous. With regard to his apostles and ministers, *their weapons were mighty, thro' God, to pull down strong holds*^g; to dispossess devils, and abolish idols; to cultivate the passions of men, and reduce them to the obedience of Christ. Tho they had no wealth, to engage people on their side; no reputation in this world; yet the doctrine they preached, and confirmed with so many miracles, was received by many: and the *durable riches*^h they proposed, and the honours of the other world, were so believed by multitudes of people, that they were willing to expose themselves to the utmost persecution upon this account. Did not the power of Christ appear so much the more, in that *this treasure was in earthen vessels*ⁱ? And that when his apostles express'd their thoughts after a plain and fa-

^d Num. 14. 17, 18.^e 2 Cor. 13. 4.^f Rom. 1. 4.^g 2 Cor. 10. 4.^h Prov. 8. 18.ⁱ 2 Cor. 4. 7.

miliar manner, it should prevail upon the minds of men above all the subtle reasoning and pompous eloquence of the philosophers? Here was *power* indeed; those who were called not only saw a divine power accompanying the gospel, but felt the power and efficacy thereof in changing their hearts, in *opening their eyes, and turning them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God* ^k.

And as for the *wisdom* of this divine dispensation, it appeared no less than *the power of God* to those who were called, to those who were unprejudiced. The speculative points of religion, the divine truths which belong to the gospel, they are above what can be found out by mens minds; we must be beholden to divine revelation for the discovery. But are these truths ever the less considerable on this account? Surely when God himself shews us the method and scheme of salvation, which he has contrived and proposed for the recovery of fallen sinners, we have reason to acknowledge his *wisdom* as well as his *power*.

The *wisdom of God* likewise appears eminently, as there is a harmony and connection betwixt all the principles of truth; as natural and revealed religion are connected together, and this revelation of grace is built upon natural religion, and supposes man crea-

^k Acts 26. 18.

ted to glorify God ; created innocent and holy, and that he had deserved punishment by his sins : revealed religion, I say, being built upon this, and being connected with it, here is marvellous wisdom, and no occasion to charge it with folly.

As for the proposal itself, 'tis wisdom for persons certainly to embrace the doctrine of the gospel, tho they expose themselves to all manner of temporal punishments : for this is undoubtedly a rational way of concluding that *it is better for a man to lose the whole world than to lose his soul ; for what shall it profit a man to gain the world and lose his own soul*¹ ? It is a rational way of arguing, that the pleasures of the mind are better than those of sense ; that 'tis better to have the esteem of God than honour and reputation amongst men. 'Tis a rational thing, if we are saved by Christ, that we should be formed according to his model ; and that we should be resigned to the divine will, to do and suffer what he requires. So the apostle argues well in the chapter following the text : *We speak wisdom amongst them that are perfect*^m ; or *perfect wisdom*, as it might be rendered. *We speak perfect wisdom*ⁿ : all the wisdom of their philosophy is but imperfect ; they are mightily out as to the way of salvation : they may discover that men are sinners, but 'tis impossible they should

¹ Mat. 16. 26.

^m 1 Cor. 2. 6.

ⁿ Σοφίαν δὲ λαλῶμεν ἐν τοῖς
τελείοις.

know which way finners will be saved, but by revelation. It is wisdom certainly to consult the interest of our souls. 'Twas wisdom in the primitive christians to embrace the doctrine of the gospel upon good evidence ; and good evidence they had by prophecies and promises which went before, as well as by the reason of the things themselves, and the harmony and connection which there is between them.

And then as to the scheme and method of making the gospel flourish in the world by such means ; here is *the wisdom of God* as well as his *power* manifest : *his thoughts are above the thoughts* of the wise men of this world, *and his ways above theirs.* There needs more wisdom to contrive such a scheme, as there needs more power to effect it. The wisdom of God appears in this, that he would take such a method that it might be known it was of God, that nothing less could give it success than the mighty power of God. What did the philosophers do ? what impressions could their documents make upon the souls of men in comparison of christianity, which makes men *wise unto salvation* ° ; refines their reason, and subjugates their passions ; teaches them how to govern themselves in this world, and prepares them for a better state ? To which may be added, that christianity makes disciples in a little time.

° 2 Tim. 3. 15. Rom. 1. 16.

Persons were converted suddenly in the primitive times; they were *turned* on a sudden *from darkneſs to light* ^p: whereas it was a long time before the philoſophers could form their diſciples to live according to the ſchemes and methods they propoſed.

Thus have I ſhewn you that there was no reaſon, if we take but this general view of the matter, for the Jews to object there was want of *power*, or the Greeks to object there was want of *wiſdom* in the doctrine of the goſpel. I ſhall now make a few brief reflections, and conclude.

I. What has been ſaid altogether, proves both the truth and excellency of chriſtianity, and therefore may ſerve to confirm our faith in it. The things which have been ſpoken of are not *cunningly deviſed fables* ^q; it is *the truth, as it is in Jeſus* ^r, which is delivered in the holy ſcripture to us; the truth which God has ordered to be fairly propoſed to men upon the moſt reaſonable and advantageous terms. Theſe things, which are the ſubſtance of the goſpel, carry ſufficient evidence with them to all who will attentively conſider them. If then we have ſuch reaſon to be chriſtians, *let us hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering* ^r: let us ſeek more and more to inform and ſatisfy our minds, that we may be able to reſiſt gain-

^p Acts 26. 18.

^q 2 Pet. 1. 16.

^r Eph. 4. 21.

^r Heb. 10. 23.

layers, and may not be *shaken by every wind of doctrine*^s; any subtle sophistry wherewith we may be attack'd. Let us inform our minds, by meditating on the grounds of christianity, that we may be always ready to defend the religion we profess; and be able to say, *we know in whom we have believed*^t, and upon what grounds we have built our faith.

2. From what has been said it may well be inferred, that it becomes those of us whose business it is to minister in sacred things, to take heed that we follow the example of the apostle, that we *preach Christ crucified*. I do not mean by this, that we should only preach upon the sufferings of our Saviour; but that we should preach Christ crucified in the large sense which has been explained: that we should, upon occasion, insist upon the grounds of christianity, and instruct the people in these, that they may not be easily shaken: that we preach the doctrine of the cross itself; and not only that, but the design of it for the salvation of sinners: those things which are necessarily supposed by it; as the fall of man, the introduction of sin into the world, the incapacity we are in to save ourselves; the doctrines which are consequent upon it, as the resurrection, ascension, and intercession of our Saviour, and his coming the second time

^s Eph. 4. 14.| ^t 2 Tim. 1. 12.

to dispense rewards and punishments. This is *preaching Christ crucified*: I don't mean that we should insist only upon the doctrine of the cross, or Christ's being substituted in our stead. The scheme laid down, shews that every part of our duty may be some way or other comprehended herein, or referred hereto: for this is the centre, and the other doctrines are so many lines which terminate in it. We are to *preach Christ crucified*, proving that he is the Messiah, and shewing what a person this was who suffered, *the only begotten Son of God*. And we cannot *preach Christ crucified*, without the consideration of the excellency of his person. 'Tis not to set him only before men as an example, but as one substituted in our room, to make atonement for our sins, to appease the wrath of God. We do not *preach Christ crucified*, if we make our salvation to depend upon our own merit, if we will not *submit to the righteousness of God**, instead of appearing in our own righteousness for our justification. 'Tis not to preach the doctrine of the cross of Christ, if we don't preach obedience to our Lord Jesus in like manner. We must teach the people the necessity of being *crucified with Christ*; that they must take his cross upon their shoulder, and follow him after the manner he has prescribed, if they will be his disciples. 'Tis not to *preach the*

* Rom. 10. 3.

cross of Christ, if we don't preach what is the duty of the people, and upon what terms they may be interested in his death. We can't preach the cross, if we don't preach repentance and faith in his name : and, if we don't preach up holiness, we shall be so far from preaching Christ, that we shall be enemies to him. 'Tis not *to preach the cross* of our blessed Saviour, if we don't preach those doctrines which are founded upon it, or necessarily supposed under it.

3. As it behoves us, who minister the word, to take heed how we preach ; so it behoves you to *take heed how you hear* ^v. If we preach the truth, we shall be clear from the blood of all men : whoever fails of salvation, we shall give up our accounts to God with acceptance at the last. I don't doubt but it may be said of many of you, *As we preach, so you have believed* ^w ; that your lives are a testimony of the truth and sincerity of your belief. But let us every one examine ourselves, and consider upon what grounds and principles we have believed ; whether it be purely what we have imbibed in education, or whether we have satisfied ourselves ; whether we have been *crucified to the world* ^x, and are *dead to sin* ^y ; whether we have accepted the terms of salvation as they are offered to us in the gospel. Oh how happy for us, if it shall at last appear that

^v Luke 8. 18.^w 1 Cor. 15. 11.^x Gal. 6. 14.^y Rom. 6. 2.

we have thus heard and embraced the joyful message of salvation ! But what a terrible consternation will they be in, who have heard this gospel but have not obeyed it ! You know the dreadful instance of the Jews, who stumbled and fell, they were *broken, and snared, and taken*^z ; they having perished after the severest manner, as having sinned against the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, as well as against the divine law ; as having resisted *the counsel of God against themselves*^a, and rejected the only method of salvation. *Take heed*, I say again, *how you hear*, lest you should have *so much sorer punishment*^b than those who are without the gospel, by having despised and rejected it. *But I hope better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, tho I thus speak*^c.

^z Isa. 8. 15.^a Luke 7. 30.^b Heb. 10. 29.^c Chap. 6. 9.



S E R M O N VI.

Preach'd at *PINNERS-HALL*, August 30, 1707.

H E B R E W S vii. 25.

Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

The first S E R M O N on this text.

 H E design of the author of this epistle being to set forth the excellency of the christian religion, he, in a special manner, insists to that purpose upon the character of our Lord Jesus Christ as Mediator ; but most of all upon that part of his mediatory office by which he offered sacrifice, and made intercession. The priestly function is that which he celebrates in a particular manner, it being most to his purpose so to do ; that he might shew by the change of the priesthood that there was a change also of the law, and might confirm the christian Hebrews in their belief of the truth of christianity.

tianity. He is upon this argument in this chapter ; and cites a passage out of the 110th psalm, to shew the dignity of our Saviour's priesthood above that of Aaron and his successors : *The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, I have made thee a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedec* ^d. From whence the author of this epistle takes notice, that whereas *the priests under the law were made without an oath*, our blessed Saviour is not invested with this office but *by the oath of God* ; and, consequently, as God doth nothing in vain, so when the solemnity of an oath is used in establishing Christ in his priestly office, it signifies there is a greater dignity belonging to him, as priest, than to the family of Aaron. *For those priests were made without an oath, but this with an oath, by him that said unto him, The Lord swear, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedec.* By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament ^e, or a better covenant. The excellency of this new covenant he describes and illustrates from divers passages of the prophets in the following chapter. The apostle farther argues from the unity of our Saviour's priesthood, that it exceeded that of Aaron : *And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death ; but this man, because he con-*

^d Psal. 110. 4.

| ^e Heb. 7. 21, 22.

tinueth ever, bath an unchangeable priesthood ^f. They were many priests ; for, as they were mortal, one succeeded another. He is speaking here of the high priest : when the high priest died, another succeeded him of the same family ; so that there was a multiplicity of priests, because of their mortal state. But our blessed Saviour is the only *high priest of our profession* ^g : for, tho he died, he died in offering himself a sacrifice ; and, in dying, conquered death ; for he was raised presently after, from the dead, and so abideth continually. And 'tis the same high priest who died upon the cross, the *high priest of our profession*, who soon after rose and enter'd into heaven. As it was the act of the high priest, to offer sacrifice, and upon the day of atonement to go into the holy of holies, there to make intercession for the sins of the people ; so seeing our Saviour was capable of performing both those acts, and the interval of his death was so short that it did not hinder the other part of his office, his intercession ; this man is said to endure continually : *He continueth ever, and bath an unchangeable priesthood* ^h. And so from the unity of this priesthood in the person of our Saviour, we see the eternity and immutability of it. *He abideth for ever, and bath an unchangeable priesthood*, upon the account which you have heard ; considering,

^f Ver. 23.^g Heb. 3. 1.^h Chap. 7. 24.

together with this dignity, the efficacy of his sacrifice, and the prevalency of his intercession : for there is no room for the change of a priesthood where the priesthood is perfect, when the person is perfectly qualified for his work, and performs it after a perfect manner.

Now *the law*, and the priesthood belonging to that state, *did not bring any thing to perfection, but the bringing in of a better hope did*ⁱ. Their sacrifices could not cleanse from moral pollutions, *but the blood of Jesus cleanseth from all sin*^k. Their priests were obliged *to sacrifice for their own sins, as well as for the sins of the people* : and if they could not purify their own consciences, how much less could they purify the consciences of others by their typical sacrifices ? But the high priest of our profession having no sin ; as he fell a sacrifice, so he could make atonement for sin. As he was God as well as man, his sacrifice was of infinite value, and this priest of infinite dignity. So that there is no room for a change, because it brings all things to perfection.

Therefore the apostle infers from the perfection, the unity and immutability, and eternity of his priesthood, that he is well accomplished to save all who come to him. *Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.*

ⁱ Heb. 7. 19.

^k 1 John 1. 7.

Wherefore

Wherefore he is able to save to the uttermost. Seeing the great high priest of our profession is such a person as I have described, *the Son of God*, the object of the worship of angels; seeing he is *a priest after the order of Melchizedec*, after the power of an *endless life*; seeing he is so perfect a person that he needs no assistance, *no successor*; seeing he is made a priest by the *oath of God*, a priest who belongs to an *everlasting covenant*; seeing he alone is fit for this province, and is a *king* as well as a *priest*, as Melchizedec was, he being of that order; seeing he is eternal and immutable, and so continues in his office; seeing things are thus, it may well be concluded, *he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him.*

So that these words are an inference from what the apostle had said before: and the inference is indeed very just and equitable. For such a priest must needs *be able to save men to the uttermost*; a priest so allied to God as to be his *Son*; a priest who is every way perfectly qualified to know our necessities, and to make provision for them; a priest capable of *bringing in everlasting righteousness*¹; a priest who is himself a sacrifice, as well as the priest who offers it; a priest who belongs to an *everlasting covenant*; a priest who is ratified and confirmed in his office by the *oath of God*; a priest *who can have no successor*, and

¹ Dan. 9. 24.

needs none, and who *abides* and continues *for ever*^m; who, as he once offered a complete sacrifice, makes intercession by the prevailing plea of his own merit and righteousness: such a priest as this must needs be *able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by him.*

And, to inculcate this the better, in the latter part of our text the apostle renders the same reason or argument in effect, from whence he had drawn the inference in the former part of it: *Seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.* This is a thing to be well considered, and duly inculcated on our minds; for from the eternity of his priesthood, among other things, he infers that he is *capable of saving those that come unto God by him.* To shew that he is able to save them, he not only repeats the argument, namely, that *he ever lives*, but explains the matter farther in shewing what his business is: *Now he ever lives at the right hand of God*ⁿ; he ever lives *to make intercession for those that come unto God by him.*

So that here are two parts in general to be considered in these words. The one is the assertion of the apostle concerning our Saviour's ability *to save to the uttermost those that come unto God by him*: *He is able also to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him.* And the other is the proof of

^m Heb. 7. 3.

1 ⁿ Heb. 8. 1.

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this assertion, the argument upon which he founds it ; which he had mentioned before, and here repeats : *Seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.*

First, We are to consider the assertion of the apostle concerning Jesus Christ, under the character of our high priest ; *He is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him.* This assertion concerning the ability of our Saviour, will furnish us with these several things particularly to be considered.

- I. What this great benefit is, which our Lord Jesus Christ procures and bestows upon *them that come to God by him.* It is *salvation*, and *salvation to the uttermost.*
- II. The capacity of our Saviour to bestow this great benefit. The apostle assures us, *he is able to save us to the uttermost.*
- III. The qualification of the persons who may partake of this benefit : *They must come to God by him ;* for the words are restrained to these persons : *He is able to save to the uttermost, them that come to God by him.*

I. In the first place we are to consider the benefit itself, which our blessed Saviour procures for, and bestows upon *them that come unto God by him.* 'Tis no less than that of *salvation :*

salvation : *salvation to the uttermost* ; that is, to perfection.

Salvation is a term frequently made use of both in the old and new testament ; and God seems in both testaments to delight to be called *the Saviour of his people*. *The hope of Israel, and the Saviour thereof in the time of trouble* °, says the prophet. And in recounting the favours he had wrought for his church, 'tis said, *So he was their Saviour* P ; i. e. hereby he made it appear he was their Saviour. And says Moses, in the close of the book of Deuteronomy, *Happy art thou, O Israel, a people saved by the Lord* †. This was their character when they sang his praise : and thus his people rejoiced in him as *the God of their salvation* †, and as *the rock of their salvation* † ; whether on the account of the more general and publick deliverances of his church, or those of a more private nature, and which regarded particular persons. But in a special manner the deliverance of the children of Israel out of Egypt, when God entred into covenant with them, became their God and their king in a peculiar manner ; and, by way of covenant, when he delivered them from a state of servitude and captivity from among the Egyptians, *saved them by a mighty hand and outstretched arm*, and declared to the world

° Jer. 14. 8.

P Isa. 63. 8.

† Deut. 33. 29.

† Psal. 65. 5.

† Psal. 95. 1.

that

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that he had taken them to himself for a peculiar people; this great deliverance gave him deservedly the name of their Saviour. Other deliverances were bestowed in various successive ages upon the church. After they had provoked God to give them into the hands of their enemies, he was pleased frequently to save them again, to turn back their captivity, and to raise them up *saviours* †, who should fight their battles, rescue them from their enemies, and protect and govern them according to the divine will. In the historical part of the old testament we have God thus celebrated as *the saviour* of that people. And as they were a typical people, and represented the church of the new testament; in allusion to this, *salvation* is so frequently spoken of in the new: and our Lord Jesus Christ is called *a saviour*; and a greater saviour he was than any of those whom God raised up to his people in former ages of the world, who were but types of him. And indeed as he presided over that people, and over that dispensation, for 'tis said *they tempted Christ in the wilderness* ‡; so he was *their saviour* then, but after a manner less glorious than he appears to be now under the new testament. And accordingly the prophets speak of God under this character, as a saviour: *Thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel the*

† Neh. 9. 27.

| † 1 Cor. 10. 9.

saviour,

saviour^t, as says the prophet Isaiah : and in a multitude of places he is represented as *a saviour*, tho he was then so after a more obscure manner, as *a God who hid himself*.

But now is his salvation displayed and laid open under the œconomy of the gospel : and when the prophets speak of God's salvation in the most pompous style, and after the most magnificent manner, their words are to be referred to the dispensation of the gospel, and the glorious state of our Lord's kingdom; the great salvation which should be made known to the world, when he would be *a light to enlighten the Gentiles*, as well as *the salvation of his people Israel*^u : which shews that the Gentiles should partake of these privileges by Jesus Christ. 'Tis said, *Israel should be saved with an everlasting salvation*^v. This is *that salvation which the prophets*, as the apostle Peter says, *diligently inquired into, when they spake before-hand of the sufferings of Christ, and of the glory that should follow*^w. So that the history of the old testament, and likewise the prophecies of it, all center'd in this thing, *the great salvation* which was to be procured by our Lord Jesus.

In the new testament you find this is his character continually : he is called *a Saviour* ; and the name Jesus signifies that he is a Saviour. *He shall be called Jesus*, says

^t Isa. 45. 15.

^u Luke 2. 32.

^v Isa. 45. 17.

^w 1 Pet. 1. 10, 11.

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the angel, *because he shall save his people from their sins*^x. This is the salvation which the gospel proposes to us, and which our Lord bestows upon us.

This salvation comprehends in it a deliverance from the greatest evils, and the bestowment of the greatest benefits. It is a present salvation from the guilt, the power and bondage of sin; and it is a *salvation from the wrath to come*^y. How great must this salvation be! to be delivered in this world from a state of the greatest shame and servitude, the most dishonourable which can be to a rational creature; and from a condition obnoxious hereafter to the greatest pains and torments, even those of eternal death! This is the salvation which our Lord bestows; a salvation from sin and death, and from the wrath to come; from all the enemies of our souls, and the just demerits of our sins.

'Tis a positive salvation too: for whom God so delivers, 'tis to make them the objects of his peculiar love; and *in his favour there is life*^z. And how happy must those be who are beloved of God? The blessing of *redeeming us from wrath to come*, is too great to be bestowed, unless upon persons he designs to honour by his special favour and protection; and unless he would make them effectually happy. Therefore this sal-

^x Mat. i. 21.

^y 1 Thess. i. 10.

^z Psal. 30. 5.

vation contains in it the bestowment of all those graces and virtues, all those privileges and comforts which belong to the state of a christian during this life ; and likewise the salvation of the soul hereafter, as the apostle speaks : *Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls* ^a. Nor is the more noble part the only object of this happiness ; but we are assured it contains in it *the redemption of the body* too from the grave : therefore the apostle to the Romans speaks of believers *waiting for the adoption, even the redemption of their bodies* ^b. Why are they said to *expect* or hope for this, when the same apostle tells us before, they are already *the children of God* ? *The Spirit of God beareth witness with their spirit, that they are children ; and, if children, then heirs* ^c : yet they *wait for the adoption*, tho they are children already ; that is, they wait for what the apostle afterwards calls *the manifestation of the sons of God* ^d : for, in *the redemption of their bodies* at the resurrection, their adoption shall be manifested to the world. 'Tis manifest to them, by *the Spirit bearing witness with their spirits, that they are the children of God* : but it will be manifest to the world that they are his children, when he owns them publickly at the great day ; when their bodies shall be redeemed from the

^a 1 Pet. 1. 9.

^b Rom. 8. 23.

^c Ver. 16, 17.

^d Ver. 19.

grave, and being re-united to their souls, they shall thus be received into the joy of their Lord.

This is in general the salvation proposed in the gospel, and which our Saviour bestows upon *those that come unto God by him*. And O how great is this salvation! as the author of this epistle observes: *How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?* A great salvation indeed; for 'tis *being saved to the uttermost*: which is the other expression we are to explain under this head.

The word in the original signifies *saving to perfection*^e, and may comprehend the extent and universality, the height and the greatness of the degree of this salvation. It surpasses any other deliverance which can be compared with it. When God saved his people formerly from the hands of the Egyptians, it was from a state of servitude: but what is the slavery of the body to that of the soul? The disproportion is very obvious, and greatly enhances the value of the salvation our Lord procures and bestows; as 'tis the salvation of the soul, and that too from the most sordid captivity to sin and Satan. *His servants we are, to whom we obey*. If we obey Satan and sin, we are their slaves. Wicked men are described as *led captive by the devil at his will*. There is no bondage so vile and so base as that of sin.

^e Heb. 2. 3.

^f Σαῶσεν εἰς τὸ παντελές.

^z Rom. 6. 16.

The Jews were delivered from the hands of their enemies by the mighty arm of God, and with great signs and wonders; but our deliverance, which is procured by Jesus Christ, is still greater on this account, as is sufficiently evinc'd by the miraculous things which were done and suffered by our Saviour in the carrying on of this salvation. Nothing can be more wonderful and surprising than that the Son of God, he who is *God over all*^h, should become the son of man, and take upon him the form of a servant, human nature in mortal circumstances, and in a mean and low condition; and live a life attended with so much affliction and poverty, with so many troubles and sorrows; and, at last, die a death the most ignominious and painful, in order to save us from our spiritual enemies. God exerted his power against the enemies of his church, when he saved his people from Egypt; but he has shed his blood to save us from the bondage of sin. What an astonishing display is here of the divine mercy and grace? This surely grace to the uttermost; for what can be compared with it? *The angels desire to look into these things*ⁱ; and well they bespeak their curiosity: for this love has a *height and depth, and length and breadth, that passes knowledge*^k.

^h Rom. 9. 5.ⁱ 1 Pet. 1. 12.^k Eph. 3. 18, 19.

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If we consider likewise the person who was employed in this salvation, we may from thence conclude that this was the greatest of all deliverances and salvations. God employed Moses, when he delivered his people out of Egypt : he was the prophet ; and he was a kind of mediator betwixt God and that people when he delivered them, and entered into a covenant with them in the wilderness. But not a servant now, but a Son is the mediator : the Son of God is engaged in this province to deliver us. Moses was honoured in the house of God greatly as a servant, but God hath sent the Son himself to speak to us, and to die for us, in these last ages of the world. Moses was an interpreter betwixt God and the people, but our blessed Saviour is a true and proper mediator. Considering the dignity of his person, it appears he came to perform the greatest deliverance ; to work out *salvation to the uttermost* for us.

Again : If we consider the continuance, the duration of this deliverance, it will appear to be *salvation to the uttermost*. The people of Israel were saved from the hands of their enemies ; but when they became idolaters, God gave them up to their enemies again : he gave his ark into captivity, and his glory into the enemies hands. But our blessed Saviour, when he comes to deliver his people, it is *with an everlasting salvation*.

vation¹. Those who are redeemed by his death, are *saved by his life*^m. And, *if when we were enemies, we were reconciled unto God by the death of his Son; much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life*ⁿ. If he had so much good will to ransom us, when in so sad a condition, from the power of sin; now we are become his friends and favourites, his tender compassion will undoubtedly preserve us. God was pleased to cast off the greatest part of the Israelites at last, to reject them, and leave them in hardness of heart and blindness of mind; but our blessed Saviour *saves to the uttermost*, even with an everlasting salvation.

Their deliverances were temporal, but ours are spiritual, and of eternal consequence to us: they were saved from external enemies, from men who hurt their bodies; but we are delivered from the enemies of our souls, from the slavery of sin, which is the greatest bondage; from the tyranny of Satan, from the tyranny of this present evil world, and the infectious examples of our fellow-creatures. *Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men*^o: that is, do not truckle to them, do not entertain their prejudices. As you are the freemen of Christ Jesus, resign yourselves intirely to his conduct, and obey him in opposition to all others. Thus, I say, to be delivered from

¹ Isa: 45. 17.

^m Heb. 5. 9.

ⁿ Rom. 5. 10.

^o 1 Cor. 7. 23.

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the dominion of sin, the tyranny of the world, and the temptations of Satan ; to be delivered from the bondage of the fear of death, and from death itself ; to be delivered from everlasting torments, from those *chains of darkness that are reserved against the judgment of the great day* ^p ; what is the greatest temporal deliverance, when compared with such a spiritual salvation as this ? And then, tho the Israelites were not only delivered from their enemies, but God gave them many privileges and immunities, protected them by his providence from their surrounding enemies, gave them a land flowing with milk and honey, bless'd their basket and their store, bless'd them with honour, with health and safety, and the like ; yet what are all these things in comparison of that salvation which extends to the health of our souls here, and bestows on us glory, honour, immortality, and eternal life hereafter ? What were all the temporal good things, with which they were supply'd, when compar'd with the rich provisions of this salvation ? to be fed with the fatness of God's house, and to be made to drink of the rivers of his pleasure ; to partake of the hidden manna, and the pleasures which are at his right hand ; to have the favour of God, and the light of his countenance ; to have the sense of the pardon of sin, and be made to *rejoice*

with joy unspeakable, and full of glory^a? to have the prospect of eternal life, and to have a Saviour, who is *entered before as our forerunner*^t, to take possession for us of that state of glory which *eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath entered into the heart of man to conceive how great it is*^f? These are the blessings which our Lord has procured for us: and thus are we *saved to the uttermost*. This salvation, 'tis true, he bestows gradually; but it will be known that his people are *saved to the uttermost* indeed, when their bodies shall be redeemed from the power of the grave, and re-united to their souls; when they shall sing with triumph, *O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory*^s? and when they shall be *received into the joy of their Lord*^t, to be engaged for ever in the most delightful and ravishing employments; and to be to eternity entertained with the knowledge of him who is infinitely perfect, with such a knowledge as will fill their souls with perpetual joy and serenity. I proposed to consider,

II. The capacity of our Saviour to bestow this great blessing of salvation, *even to the uttermost*. It is a *great salvation*, every one will easily acknowledge, by the general description which has been given of it; and

^a 1 Pet. 1. 8.

^t Heb. 6. 20.

^f 1 Cor. 2. 9.

^s 1 Cor. 15. 55.

^t Mat. 25. 21.

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when compared with other salvations which God has wrought out for his people, those deliverances seem little in comparison of this. But now we are to consider the ability of our Lord, who has undertaken to bestow this great benefit upon us. *He is able*, the apostle says, *to save to the uttermost*. And there is no room to doubt of our Saviour's ability, if we consider him either as he is God, or as he is Mediator.

If we consider him as God, he has infinite knowledge and wisdom, infinite power, infinite grace and mercy : and, as possess'd of these divine perfections, what cannot he undertake and bring about for our interest ? The prophet Isaiah gives this as the character of him, that he is *mighty to save* : *Who is this that cometh from Edom ? with dy'd garments from Bozrah ? I, the Lord, mighty to save* ^u. He must needs be mighty to save who is omnipotent. There is no power can resist him with success ; for all creatures are intirely subject to him, and he *does whatsoever he pleases in heaven and earth, in the sea, and all deep places* ^v. *None can stay his hand, or say unto him, what dost thou* ^w ? As he has all power, so he is infinitely knowing and wise : he understands all things, and knows how to produce what effects he pleases ; and to alter the course of nature, if he sees fit to bring about his designs. He knows how

^u Isa. 63. 1.

^v Psal. 135. 6.

^w Dan. 4. 35.

to contrive the things which are most difficult, and to unite and reconcile those things which seem very opposite. It was infinite wisdom which contrived the way how we might be delivered, and yet the justice of God honoured as well as his mercy; how sin might be punished, and yet the sinner forgiven; how sinners might be encouraged to hope for eternal life, and yet at the same time be discouraged from committing sin. *Mercy and truth* were made to *meet together*, and *righteousness and peace* to *kiss each other*^x. And thus the apostle tells the Corinthians, that Christ is both *the wisdom and the power of God*^y. But farther, consider infinite grace and mercy, what will not that effect? What wonderful things have been performed by men in behalf of those they love, things which seem to surpass the force of human nature, when love has been the motive; love which is strong as death? Some friends, what have they not done, what have they not suffered for others? But, when we consider divine love, infinite mercy and goodness, infinite grace; what could not that effect? what could not that bring about in favour of poor unworthy sinners? Our blessed Lord, who has shewn how much he loved mankind by assuming their nature, becoming *bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh*, has abundantly de-

^x Psal. 85. 10.

^y 1 Cor. 1. 24.

clared what his love could do, what his love could suffer : and no instance in the world was ever like him, either in doing or suffering, to bring about this salvation. He who has so much power, so much wisdom and knowledge, and so much love, is certainly *able to save to the uttermost.*

But as a person ought not only to have infinite power, but infinite wisdom and love, who shall undertake such a province as this ; so he must have a call from God. *No man takes this honour* as priest, or any other province as mediator ; no man should take this honour to himself, *but he that is called of God, as was Aaron* ¹. Now our Lord Jesus Christ is properly instated in the office of mediator: To this purpose the Father and holy Spirit concurred in the work of our redemption ; and our blessed Lord, as second person in the Trinity, is invested in this office : he is confirmed therein, as you have heard, *with an oath* ². And he was qualified for it ; for he was able to suffer and die for our sakes, to be our surety, and to make satisfaction to divine justice for us. And he had power to rise from the dead, that he might be our intercessor. He is a divine person, and, as such, fit to negotiate the affairs of God ; a proper person to treat with God, seeing he has an infinite interest in the Father, being *his only begotten Son*, and of the same essence with

¹ Heb. 5. 4.

² Chap. 7. 20, 21.

him :

him : and, on the other hand, he has a great and prevailing interest with men, seeing he is of their own nature, and so capable of treating with them in the most familiar manner ; of persuading them, and arguing with them from things which come under their cognisance, and which are suited to their apprehensions, from what he has done and suffered, and the example he has set them during his conversation in the world. He is qualified to present their petitions with the greatest tenderness, *seeing he is touch'd with a feeling of their infirmities* ^b ; he is capable of representing to them the divine perfections and requirements after the most perfect manner, seeing he is fully acquainted with the will of his Father. In a word, he is perfectly qualified as a king to govern them ; and he is *such an high priest as became us, seeing he is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens* ^c.

Our blessed Saviour, you see from these characters, *is able to save to the uttermost*. Such a mediator as this *became us* ; and there is room to put our confidence in one so well qualified. He is able to conquer Satan : *Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world* ^d : he can break his snares, and burst his bands. Thus, when he was engaged in this conflict upon earth, and in our

^b Heb. 4. 15.

^c Chap. 7. 26.

| ^d 1 John 4. 4.

flesh ;

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flesh; *I beheld Satan*, says he, *falling from heaven as lightning*^e. Tho the powers of darkness were combined against our Saviour, yet he overcame them all. They attacked him most violently when he was in a state of weakness, that I may use the apostle's expression; *He was crucified in weakness*^f. *Now is your hour, and the power of darkness*^g. But yet again the apostle says to the Colossians, that *he triumphed over principalities and powers*; that *he spoiled them, and made a shew of them openly upon the cross*^h: and, if when crucified in weakness, in a mortal state, he gain'd this victory; of what conquest or victory should we distrust now our Saviour is upon his throne? Tho he once died, he henceforth *dieth no more*ⁱ: now he is immortal in regard of his human nature, and has the command of all angels and of all men, the dominion over all creatures; for *all authorities and powers are made subject to him*^k. Moreover, he who has an almighty power, and the hearts of men in his hands; and who, as our mediator, has received the promise of the holy Spirit to pour forth upon us, he is undoubtedly able to conquer all our prejudices, and bring our souls into a subjection to himself: nothing so perverse but can be conquered by omnipotent grace. He who has such an interest

^e Luke 10. 18.

^f 2 Cor. 13. 4.

^g Luke 22. 53.

^h Col. 2. 15.

ⁱ Rom. 6. 9.

^k 1 Pet. 3. 22.

with

with his Father, and in whom his Father is *well-pleased*¹, as he has declared; and well-pleased not only with his person but his undertaking, and has given him, according to his promise, success in it: he, who has this interest in the Father, is capable of shedding abroad his love into our hearts, and procuring for us the joy of his salvation, that *peace of God which passes all understanding*^m. He who is thus qualified can make reconciliation; he *has the hearts of men in his hands*ⁿ, and can turn them towards God: and, as he has *offered a sacrifice well-pleasing to God, so the pleasure of the Lord will prosper in his hands*^o. And we cannot fail of being reconciled, if our Lord Jesus Christ operates upon our souls after such a manner; and this he will do upon *those who come to God by him*. No trouble, be it ever so great, can be able utterly to depress our minds, if our Lord supports us by the right hand of his righteousness. Seeing he is our intercessor, we shall be preserved in the hour of temptation; he will give us strength to bear whatsoever he shall see fit to lay upon us. He who has promised his presence with us, *when we pass thro' the fire or thro' the water*, that the one should not *overwhelm us*, nor the other *devour us*^p; he who has promised to be with us in all kind of trouble, and that

¹ 2 Pet. 1. 17.^m Phil. 4. 7.ⁿ Prov. 21. 1.^o Isa. 53. 10.^p Chap. 43. 2.

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he will never leave us nor forsake us, but guide us by his counsel till he bring us to glory^a; he who has expressed his love in the greatest instances in doing and suffering for us, will now certainly pursue his own conquest, and will not lose the price of his own blood. Seeing he has undergone the reproach of the cross, and is raised to a state of dignity and glory, at his Father's right hand; how can we think he'll lose his own labour? Can we imagine he will not perfect that work, the foundation of which was laid in his own blood? that he will not watch over his own church, when he has promised *the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*^r? And that he who ever lives to intercede for us, will refuse to offer the prayers of *them that come humbly to God by him*, and commit themselves to him, as to a merciful Creator and Redeemer? Is it to be imagined he will not *save to the uttermost*? that he will not surmount all difficulties which stand in the way of our salvation? As the apostle was confident that *he who had begun a good work upon the primitive christians, would carry it on*^r; so may we confide in the divine grace and mercy, that he will not suffer those to become a prey to the temptations of Satan whom he has recovered from that bondage by the efficacy of his grace. Is it to be imagined that our Lord is not *able to save to the*

^a Psal. 73. 24.

^r Mat. 16. 18.

^r Phil. 1. 6.

uttermoſt, when you ſee he is, in all reſpects, ſo well qualified for this purpoſe? Why then ſhould his mercy be at any time doubted of?

But I muſt farther obſerve to you, that his *ability to ſave to the uttermoſt*, includes his willingneſs to do ſo; for, if our Lord were able to ſave, and yet not willing, we might be in a ſtate of dejection indeed: but he is willing, as well as able. And that is evident from another place in this epiſtle, where the apoſtle, ſpeaking of Chriſt, ſays; *Who, in the days of his fleſh, when he had offered up prayers and ſupplication with ſtrong crying and tears, unto him that was able to ſave him from death*^s, &c. Our Lord did not only believe his Father was able to ſave him from death, but willing; for the will of God in that caſe was not to be doubted of. So Chriſt is *able to ſave*, and who can doubt of his willingneſs? When he was ſo ready to ſhed his blood for enemies and rebels, and when he foreſaw the pains of the croſs, and had before he came to it felt that agony in the garden, which made him ſweat drops of blood, yet would go on and make his life a ſacrifice; he, who has ſuffered this, to be ſure muſt be willing to ſave. So in the 3d chapter of Daniel, when the three children declared to the tyrannical king, who would have had them bow down to an idol, that

^s Heb. 5. 7.

they would not do it; *Our God*, say they, *is able to save us*, able to deliver us: and how is this explained afterwards? *and that he will deliver us*^t: for he did effectually deliver them; and it was by faith they were delivered from the flames of fire. Thus when our Lord says, *None are able to pluck his sheep out of his Father's hands*^u, he intimates some would attempt it, be willing to do it: and so when his ability to save us, is spoken of, it signifies that he is willing to do it. When *Abraham was persuaded that what God had promised he was able to perform*^v; he not only believed he was able, but that he would perform it: for he had said, *in Isaac his seed should be called*^w; therefore he believed he would be preserved or raised from the dead. So in the 11th to the Romans, when the apostle speaks of God's being able to graft the Gentiles into the stock of the good olive-tree, he signifies he had sufficiently declared he would do it. And in the 14th chapter of that epistle, *ver. 4.* when the apostle speaks of God's *being able to make his people stand*, he signifies that *he would do it: Yea, he shall be holden up; for God is able to make him stand.* So when 'tis said to the Corinthians, *he is able to make all grace abound*^x; it signifies his willingness so to do. And when the apostle Jude ascribes

^t Dan. 3. 17.^u John 10. 29.^v Rom. 4. 21.^w Chap. 9. 7.^x 2 Cor. 9. 8.

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praise to him that is able to keep us from falling^y, he intends the same thing. So that when 'tis said here, our Saviour is able to save to the uttermost them that come to God by him; 'tis plain it imports he is very willing to do so. And this one consideration is indeed enough to prove it: he has suffered to the uttermost, in order to save them to the uttermost; and now that it costs him no pain, no sorrow, our Lord will certainly put in execution all that remains to perfect their salvation, that they may be perfect and compleat in that day, that they may be made perfect in glory.

The third thing to be considered, is, the qualification of the persons upon whom our Saviour is able to bestow, and will bestow this great blessing of *salvation to the uttermost*; and that is *those that come to God by him*. But this, and the other part of the text, must be referred to another time. I will conclude with making two or three reflections. And,

1. If this salvation, which our Lord is capable of bestowing, be, as you have heard, so great salvation; how much does it concern us all to seek after it? How miserable are those who are in a state of sin, obnoxious to the wrath of God, under the sentence of his law, the slaves of Satan, and led captive by him at his will; under spiritual bondage

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to sin, and exposed to the judgments of God in this world, and in that which is to come? How miserable a state is it *to have no hope*, to be without hope, without Christ, *without God in the world*^z; and not only without hope, but to have reason to fear everlasting torments? Why, *to such persons as these, is the word of salvation sent*, as the gospel is called^a: and, it may be said, *This day is salvation come to this place*^b. And so every where, where the gospel is preached, salvation comes. 'Tis offered to men, even *to the chief of sinners*^c: for Christ is able *even to save them; to save to the uttermost all that come to God by him*. Of how great importance is it for men to seek after the salvation of their souls, and the redemption of their bodies from the power of the grave by a blessed resurrection? to be delivered from a multitude of evils which encompass them here, and to be made completely happy, according to their most enlarged desires and wishes hereafter? How great is this blessing! how wonderful these advantages! And *how shall we escape then, if we neglect so great salvation*^d?

2. And as for those who have partaken of this salvation; how should they adore and magnify the divine grace? We were *children of wrath by nature, even as others*^e; we

^z Eph. 2. 12.

^a Acts 13. 26.

^b Luke 19. 9.

^c 1 Tim. 1. 15.

^d Heb. 2. 3.

^e Eph. 2. 3.

were without hope, we were alienated from the life of God^f, and from his covenant; we were without any due ground of hope while in a state of sin; we were in a state of servitude to Satan, and enemies to our Lord Jesus Christ, while under the power and dominion of sin: but our case is altered, and we are turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God^g. If there be a new heart, and a right spirit put within us^h; if we have our consciences sprinkled with the blood of Christⁱ, and have received remission of sins thro' faith in his name^k; have been reconciled to God by him; how should we adore and bless the divine grace, that so great a benefit has been bestowed upon us? And how much does it become us to walk worthy of the gospel of our salvation; and to seek earnestly that Christ, who ever lives to intercede for us, would grant us the continual supplies of his grace to help us in time of need^l?

3. If our blessed Lord be thus able to save to the uttermost, what confidence should we have in his merit and righteousness, in his mercy and grace? As we should be careful to walk worthy of this salvation, so we should have a care of provoking him, by distrusting his good will towards us. Diffidence in ourselves may make us humble; but distrust of

^f Eph. 4. 18.

^g Acts 26. 18.

^h Ezek. 18. 31.

ⁱ Heb. 10. 22.

^k Acts 10. 43.

^l Heb. 4. 16.

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him is reproaching him, and *charging him foolishly*^m. Let us have a care of offending him by our unbelief. It becomes us to trust in his ability, and to exercise holy confidence in his good will and favour, seeing he has given us such proof and demonstration as this. But let us, by no means, take occasion from hence to be negligent ; for, as this is directly contrary to the design and tendency of his grace, so it would greatly provoke him. Let us be *diligent to work out our salvation with fear and trembling*, at the same time that we believe 'tis God that *worketh in us to will and to do, of his good pleasure*ⁿ.

^m Job 1. 22.

ⁿ Phil. 2. 12, 13.



Q²

SER



SERMON VII.

Preach'd at PINNERS-HALL, Sept. 6, 1707.

HEBREWS vii. 25.

Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

The second SERMON on this text.



Now proceed to the last thing under the first general head; namely,

III. The qualification of the persons who partake of this so great salvation. They are thus described in the text; *Those that come unto God by him.* Our Lord is able to save to the uttermost: but all men are not saved in fact; none partake of this great benefit but *those that come unto God by Jesus Christ.* And here it will be requisite for us to consider,

I. What

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1. What it is *to come to God.* And then,
2. What it is *to come to God by Jesus Christ.*

1. What it is *to come to God.*

To come to God, is a phrase very frequently used in the holy scriptures. It does suppose, in the first place, men to have been in a state of alienation from him, and indeed of enmity against him : therefore they are frequently called upon by the prophets, and by our Lord and his apostles, to *return*, and *come unto God*. Sin separates between God and men : as he is infinitely holy, it alienates his affections from his creatures ; and, as sin depraves their minds, it makes them opposite to God, and alienates their affections from him. As sin is the most unnatural thing in the world, I mean most contrary to the original nature and design of man, as formed by God ; so it must tend, in its own nature, to make men miserable : and therefore, when their misery is described by the apostle Paul, he represents them as *alienated from the life of God, and without God in the world* ° ; and as being in a state of enmity against him. Consider him as the supreme good, as being absolutely perfect ; and consider that his creatures were made by him, and must be intirely dependent upon him : what then must be the consequence of his aversion to them, and of their aversion to

° Eph. 4. 18.

him? Their averſion to him, in its own nature, makes them miſerable; and his averſion to them, would heap poſitive miſery and deſolation upon them. *In his favour is life*^p, but his anger muſt needs produce death, eternal death, if it abides upon men. Now the goſpel calls men to *return*, and to *come unto God*; that is, it invites them to receive the tokens of his favour and kindneſs: it propoſes to them that they may be reſtored unto his affection, and that they may be made happy, tho they have rendered themſelves miſerable: it acquaints them, that tho they have deſtroyed themſelves for lack of knowledge, yet in him they are ſafe. And thus our bleſſed Saviour expoſtulates with men in his word, and invites finners to come to him: *Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you reſt*^q. And the prophet Iſaiah: *Ho, every one that thirſteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk, without money and without price*^r. And, *Come, and let us reſort together, ſaith the Lord: tho your ſins be as ſcarlet, they ſhall be white as ſnow; tho they be red like crimſon, they ſhall be as wool*^s. This manner of ſpeaking is uſed to ſignify, that they ſhould lay down their arms, as 'twere, and ſubmit to their Saviour, in expectation of mercy from him; no more

^p Pſal. 30. 5.

^q Mat. 11. 28.

^r Iſa. 55. 1.

^s Chap. 1. 18.

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persist in rebellion against him, but comply with his gracious proposals. When men are conscious of guilt, if there be no hope of mercy, there is no encouragement to return, but they are desperate in their sins, and continue their aversion to that Being from whom they expect nothing but severe punishment: but when God declares he has found a ransom, and has devised means, by which his banished may return, and may not for ever be expelled from him; when he adds the solemnity of an oath to his declaration, *As I live, saith the Lord, I desire not the death of a sinner, but that he should return and live*^s; this gives some encouragement to men to think of escaping the wrath to come, and avoiding that condemnation which they have deserved by their sins. And therefore *coming to God*, or returning to him, in the language of scripture, does import every thing which tends to our everlasting advantage; and signifies the whole progress of the divine work upon the souls of men, to unite them to God, after they have been such strangers and aliens.

Accordingly, you will find this phrase is used in the scripture in the general, to signify our reconciliation to God. *Those that come unto God*, have all those things said of them, and those privileges and blessings promised to them, which are bestowed upon persons

^s Ezek. 33. 11.

said to be reconciled, to be converted, to be regenerate, and the like. More particularly,

(1.) It imports the sense of mens guilt and misery: for nothing will put the soul in motion but the avoiding of misery, or obtaining some good. When we are sensible we are in a state of misery by our sins, and are become obnoxious to God's severe re-
sentments; when we desire consequently a deliverance from this misery, and when there is *hope set before us* of obtaining the divine favour, and of being happy for ever; this puts the soul in motion. *Incline your ear,* says the Lord, *and come unto me; hear, and your souls shall live: and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David*[†]. When the prophet invites men to partake of the blessings of the gospel, at the beginning of the same chapter, *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters,* &c. he supposes them to be *hungring and thirsting after righteousness*; for 'tis impossible to move men who are in a state of intire stupidity, and have no sense of their misery. Till they are convinced that they are miserable, and are obnoxious to the divine wrath, they will not take one step towards everlasting happiness. They are the *thirsty*, who are called to come to the waters. *The whole have no need of a physician, but*

[†] Isa. 55. 3.

they that are sick. Christ came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance ^u. Therefore men must be sensible of their guilt, and, consequently, of their misery, or else they *will not come to him that they may have life*; as our Lord speaks of those who thought themselves righteous: *Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life* ^v. They were not convinced of their great guilt, and of the misery consequent thereupon. In the 3d chapter of Jeremiah, ver. 22. God says to the people of Israel; *Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings*: and what is the answer? *Behold, we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God.* “We come unto thee, sensible of our guilt, and of our misery.” Again,

(2.) It signifies a desire of being informed and instructed. Thus in the 7th chapter of John, ver. 37, 38. when our Saviour preached, he called aloud to the people in the last day, the great day of the feast: *If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink: He that believeth on me, as the scripture saith, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.* They who would receive his divine instruction, should have the advantage and assistance of his Spirit; so that they should be capable of instructing others. Those who would thus come unto him, as their divine master, to teach them, are the persons en-

^u Mark 2. 17.

1 ^v John 5. 40.

couraged by his promise : and therefore he calls upon men, Mat. 11. 28, 29. *Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest : take my yoke upon you, and learn of me.* To come to him, is to be willing to be informed and instructed as his disciples. So in the Revelation : *Whosoever will, let him come : the Spirit saith, come ; and the bride saith, come ; and, whosoever will, let him come, and take of the water of life freely* ^w : be instructed and informed of those divine truths which are contained in the doctrine of Jesus Christ. Moreover,

(3.) It signifies prayer. To come unto God, is to pray to him : and, indeed, it signifies the worship of God in general. So Heb. 10. 1. 'tis said : *For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never, with those sacrifices, which they offered year by year continually, make the comers thereunto perfect.* It can never make those, who worship that way by sacrifice, truly perfect : For, as the apostle says in the 4th verse, *the blood of bulls and goats can never take away sin ; that's impossible.* So Heb. 11. 6. *He that cometh to God, must believe that he is ; and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.* He that comes to God, that is, he who will worship God, must believe his being, or else there can be no ground to worship him ; and he must believe, *he is a rewarder of them who*

^w Rev. 17. 22.

diligently seek him, otherwise there is no encouragement to hope for success in his addresses. Thus the psalmist, addressing himself to God, says: *O thou, that hearest prayer, to thee shall all flesh come* ^z; that is, to pray unto thee, and to worship thee. So Isaiah, when he prophesies of our blessed Saviour, and opposes him to all idols and false Gods, says: *Surely shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength; even to him shall men come* ^y. Instead of worshipping idols, as they did before, *to him shall men come: and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed.* They shall worship him, as is said in the foregoing verses: *Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else, &c.* *To him every knee shall bow; that is, shall worship him. Even to him shall men come; him they shall worship.* And, consequently,

(4.) It signifies obedience; as in that forecited passage, Mat. 11. our Saviour requires men *to come to him*, that is, *to take his yoke upon them*, and to obey him: for, to become his disciples, signifies to obey. And so *to come to the Father, to come to God*, as it is in the words of our text, must imply mens having a sense of their guilt and misery upon their minds: it must signify a willingness and inclination to be informed and instructed in the true way of salvation; and their sub-

^z Psal. 65. 2.

| ^y Isa. 45. 24.

mission to God, and worshipping of him: and worship imports not only prayer, but other religious acts; and certainly includes obedience to him. None indeed can *come*, but *those whom the Father draws*²: and when he upbraids some who would not come to him, the meaning is, they would not put their trust and confidence in him; they would not obey him. According therefore to this general notion, it contains in it the whole of religion; and those who would be saved, according to the words of our text, must thus *come unto God*. They must come with a sense of their guilt and of their misery; they must be willing to be taught and instructed; they must put their confidence in him; they must worship and obey him. We come then to consider,

2. What it is *to come to God by Christ*. He is able to save to the uttermost, them that *come unto God by him*. Men do not approach the throne of God with acceptance, in any other way than he has constituted and appointed, and revealed to them; and that is by Jesus Christ: *none comes to the Father but by him*. 'Tis true, none can come to Christ unless *the Father draw him* by his prevailing grace; for 'tis by the divine grace that we are informed and instructed concerning Jesus the true Messiah, and that our feet are turned into the way of peace. 'Tis by the divine

² John 6. 44.

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grace that our hearts are touched at first, and inclined to inquire after *the truth*, as it is in *Jesus*, and after the way of salvation. But when we are informed and instructed in the way, then we are to address ourselves to God after the manner he has constituted and appointed. This is *the new and living way*^a. Thus Christ declares of himself: *I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man can come to the Father but by me*^b. When men are sensible of their own guilt, how is it possible for them to entertain any proper apprehensions of the majesty of God, and the holiness and justice of his nature, without being surprized, without being overwhelmed with fear and trembling? The best of men, when under these impressions, have discovered an extraordinary terror of mind: and therefore Job begs, *he would not suffer his dread to make him afraid*^c; and declares, *he could not stand in the sight of God to justify himself*^d, and wishes there might be *a days-man*, or mediator *between them*^e, that so he might speak and open his cause to him. God is *of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*^f: he is infinitely holy; and therefore the most holy men have *abhorred themselves, and repented in dust and ashes*, when they have considered that. When Abraham is praying for Sodom particularly, how hum-

^a Heb. 10. 20.

^b John 14. 6.

^c Job 13. 21.

^d Job 42. 5, 6. ch. 9. 20.

^e Job 9. 33.

^f Hab. 1. 13.

bly does he express himself; and what apology does he make, because he took upon him again and again to speak to God? He took upon him, who was but *dust and ashes*. So when men seriously consider the infinite justice of God, and the perfection of his law, and, at the same time, how much they have provoked the one, and violated the other; when they consider the terrible judgments their sins have righteously deserved, it is no wonder they are ready to sink down into despair. But to prevent this, God has revealed to us a way whereby we may approach him. Tho' *he is a consuming fire*, on the account of the strictness of his justice, and the glory of his majesty; and tho' we are but as dry stubble, and might expect to be consumed by him, yet he has shewn us there is a way whereby we may approach him with acceptance: the lustre of his glory is so temper'd, as it shines in the face of Jesus Christ, who is man as well as God, that the discovery of the divine perfections becomes supportable to us. And, on the other hand, the satisfaction our Lord Christ has made, by his atoning sacrifice, has rendered it consistent with the holiness and justice of God to be reconciled to us: for, seeing we *come by Jesus Christ*, by virtue of our union with him, we are allied to the divine majesty, and become *heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ* ^s. If he is *not ashamed to call us brethren* ^h; he, who is the brightness

^s Rom. 8. 17.

^h Heb. 2. 11.

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of his Father's glory, and the express image of his personⁱ; under his umbrage we may be accepted, and the Father will not be ashamed to call us children: *He is not ashamed to be called their God^k*; as we are assured by the author of this epistle. 'Tis under this character therefore we are to consider Jesus Christ. We are *to come to God by him*: that is, we are to worship God in his name; to believe in him for the divine favour, and for eternal life. 'Tis thro' Jesus Christ, as Mediator, we are to offer our worship to God. We have been ungrateful enemies, as well as aliens: it must therefore be of the utmost consequence to have a right notion of our Lord Jesus Christ as our Mediator. And,

(1.) The notion which is given of Christ, as Mediator, is that of an *interpreter*, or *messenger* between God and men. Moses is called a mediator in this sense; *as the law was delivered by his hands^l*. God conversed with him after a most peculiar and intimate manner, as a man converses with his friend; and communicated to him his will, the whole scheme of that religion which was delivered to the Jews. Thus the Lord, by the mediation of his servant Moses, proposes to the people the terms of a covenant; and that he would bestow upon that nation peculiar favours, if they would agree to those terms, and would worship him according to the

ⁱ Heb. 1. 3.

^k Heb. 11. 16.

^l Gal. 3. 19.

manner prescribed, and keep those laws he enjoined them: he would take upon him the government of them; he would be their king, and would protect them from their enemies. Thus when they came to worship, according to his institution, upon the three anniversary feasts, their frontiers should be guarded by his providence, so that their enemies should not make any invasion upon them: and the people do consent to the terms of this covenant; they solemnly profess that God should be their God, and they would worship him according to his institution; that they would put their trust in his name, and be obedient to his laws. So far Moses was capable of being a mediator, in a proper sense. Thus was our Lord Jesus Christ mediator, in a proper sense also; and a mediator of a higher character than Moses. Moses himself exceedingly *feared and quaked*^m when he conversed so intimately with God: he was but a man, but our blessed Saviour was a divine person; and, as he assumed human nature, was qualified therefore above all others, to be a messenger or interpreter. God was pleased to communicate his mind by Christ: *The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ*ⁿ. Christ gave a more ample account of the divine will, and revealed things which lay obscure before: and whereas the reve-

^m Heb. 12. 21.| ⁿ John 1. 17.

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lation which was given by Moses, was full of terror, and exposed men to fear ; now, under the dispensation of the gospel, the terms of the covenant our Lord exhibits, are so mild and so full of grace, of love and mercy, and the divine promises are so explicit concerning eternal life, that *life and immortality are said to be brought to light* °, in a more eminent manner. Thus did our Lord Jesus, as an *interpreter*, or *messenger* from the Father, declare to men the gracious designs of God : and what he did not particularly declare in his own preaching, while upon earth, he enabled his apostles to publish, in his name, by the effusion of his holy Spirit upon them after he was ascended on high. And as Moses went into the mount, to carry back what the people said concerning the divine covenant, their promise and engagement to obey the laws God had prescribed them ; so our blessed Lord is ascended into heaven : and as he there *ever lives to intercede for us*, so he bears upon his heart the names of the people ; and in this he was typified by Aaron, who bore upon his breast-plate the names of the several tribes which had engaged in solemn covenant with God. But,

(2.) The notion of mediator does not only signify a messenger from God, and an interpreter between God and the people ; but it signifies one who *reconciles* God and man.

This is the character which is given of our blessed Lord and Saviour : and Moses could not be called a *reconciler* in a proper sense, tho indeed he was so typically. He put himself in the breach, when God said he would destroy the people : and *he had destroyed them, had not Moses, his servant, stood in the breach*^p. Thus God was intreated of Moses, and told him he would spare them, that he would not cut them off. And, notwithstanding there are severe instances of his judgments upon this perverse people, yet, when Moses pleads for them, God offers to make of him a great nation, saying, *Let me alone, that I may destroy them*^q ; intimating, that without a mediator they must perish : no, says Moses, rather *blot me out of thy book*^r ; *blot me out of the book of life*, rather cut me off from this earth, than let this whole people be destroyed. This signified the necessity of a mediator, by way of reconciliation, to interpose between God and them, and to appease the divine wrath. But then, as Moses could only obtain a temporal preservation, because he could not make an atonement for sin ; so this intercession was a typical representation of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ, who only could make such an atonement. He is a *reconciler* indeed ; he was blotted out of God's book, as it were ; that is, he became a victim, a sacrifice upon the cross :

^p Psal. 106. 23.

^q Deut. 9. 14.

^r Exod. 32. 32.

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his life was taken from him ; *He was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities*^f : and God has declared himself *well-pleased* in his sacrifice, and that he is reconciled to those who come to him in the name of Jesus Christ ; they shall obtain mercy, and shall succeed in their requests, who come in his name, and desire to be washed *in that fountain he has opened for sin and for uncleanness*^g. And, as you heard before, as Moses could not offer a real atonement to purge the conscience from sin, and reconcile God to men ; so, on the other hand, he could not reconcile men to God. To reconcile God to men, there must be an atonement ; to reconcile men to God, the obstinacy of their hearts must be taken away, and they must be inclined to repentance and new obedience ; they must renounce their former deeds ; they must repent in dust and ashes ; they must abandon their sins, and devote themselves solemnly to the service of God. Now how to produce such effects as these upon the minds of men, is not to be accounted for, if it be left in the hands of men. The most powerful motives which can be produced by them, will have but a very little effect upon those who are *sold under sin*^h, and *led captive by the devil at his will*ⁱ ; whose natures are corrupt : so that it must be one who has a proper ascendancy over the minds of men, and

^f Isa. 53. 5.

^g Zech. 13. 1.

^h 2 Kings 17. 17. Rom. 7. 14.

ⁱ 2 Tim. 2. 26.

can turn them as the rivers of water, who undertakes to reconcile them to God. Notwithstanding all the persuasive things which are said concerning the divine love, and the endearing sollicitations in the word of God to invite sinners to be reconciled; the greatest part of those who profess to believe the atoning sacrifice of our Saviour, do not conform themselves to the divine will, but still sin against their consciences, and against the terrors of the Lord, and those dreadful threatenings which should persuade them to abandon their sins: and therefore to bring about this salvation, there must be a powerful effect wrought upon their hearts; and this our Lord is capable of doing as mediator, when men come to God by him. As there is merit enough in Christ to appease the divine anger; so likewise the powerful assistance of his grace, which he has merited, and is pleased to bestow, this softens the hearts of men, and makes them contrite; this makes them turn at his counsel, and subject themselves to his will. While he speaks, *their hearts even burn within them* ^v; as the disciples said of what our Saviour discoursed to them, when going to Emmaus. While his divine truths are opened to them by the ministry of his word, *their hearts are opened* to receive them; as is said of Lydia, when she attended to the things spoken by Paul ^w. Thus our Lord, as

^v Luke 24. 32.

^w Acts 16. 14.

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mediator, has power with God to obtain all the blessings of the new covenant for us ; and has power on the souls of men, to persuade them effectually to be reconciled to God. But then,

(3.) The notion of a mediator likewise comprehends in it the work of *intercession*. This I have, in some measure, intimated to you already ; and shewn you, in this respect, how Christ excels Moses, who endeavoured indeed to reconcile God and the people, at least in regard to their temporal circumstances, that they should be preserved and continue for a time in this world. And tho he might, and no doubt did pray earnestly for spiritual blessings for them ; yet our blessed Lord is the only proper and successful intercessor on this account, he only can procure these blessings. But the notion of an intercessor, which I principally mean here, is that which relates to the priestly office. For, upon the memorable day of the annual atonement, recorded in Lev. 16. when the priest had offered sacrifice, and the flesh of the beasts was burnt without the camp, at a distance from the sanctuary, which signified that our Lord Jesus Christ must suffer without the gates of Jerusalem, bearing our reproach, bearing, as our surety, the guilt which was chargeable upon us, because he undertook to satisfy for our guilt ; so as the high priest, after this, went into the holy of holies, and burnt incense before the mercy-seat, this was to signify

God's favourable acceptance of those who worshiped him after the manner he required: and, as he came not without the blood of the sacrifice, and sprinkled it towards the mercy-seat; so this was also to signify, that our Saviour ascending into heaven, was to intercede there, and present the plea, which is so agreeable to God, from the merit of his sacrifice: and therefore the way is represented as *a new and living way*^x, by which we come to God; or, as the word in the original signifies, *a fresh way*^y. Now this way, which our Lord Jesus shews us to glory and happiness, is by his sacrifice. It is by this way we must go to God; for he pleads his own blood, now he is established as intercessor *at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens*^z. But of this I shall have occasion to speak more particularly, when I come to treat of the last part of the text, viz. of Christ's *ever living to make intercession for them*. Now Moses could not be a proper intercessor on this account, because he was not properly a priest: the priesthood was committed to Aaron. But our Lord is a priest, and can be a proper mediator, because as he could offer a sacrifice to reconcile, so he is an intercessor: he performs that part of the priestly function in like manner. We must come to God by him therefore, as our intercessor,

^x Heb. 10. 20.

^y ὁδὸν πρόσφατον. *viam re-*

centem. Ar. Mon.

^z Heb. 8. 1.

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But then, in the last place, the notion of a mediator likewise comprehends in it that of a third person, by whom we have *communion* with another. If we be reconciled to God, there is need that this reconciliation be continued. Reconciliation brings us to his favour; but then we must have some principle by which we may persist in communion with God: for such is his holiness and justice, and such is our frailty and infirmity, and every breach of his law deserves such a punishment, that here would new differences arise, and God would be alienated again and again from us on the account of our sins, unless there was a principle to keep us in his favour and love. This is the character of our blessed Lord; he is a *mediator of communion* between God and us. Moses, or any other, could not be so; the dignity of such a mediator as he was, was not great enough to be a principle of communion between God and men. This must be a person who must be intimate with God, equal with the Father, as well as *bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh*. Our Lord is qualified for this because of his divine and human nature: besides, as he is become a surety for us, and that is the notion of his being a reconciler; so he has engaged for his people, and *none shall be able to pluck them out of his hand*^a. He has engaged, that *all that the Father has given him, shall come to him*^b;

^a John 10. 28.

^b Chap. 6. 37.

shall be preserved to the last day ; and he assures us, on the part of the Father, that we shall have his favour, and continue in his love : if we come in his name, he will bestow on us his holy Spirit. So that seeing we are assured of this, and that he is in heaven to this purpose, and this depends upon the fit execution of his work as intercessor, that he should communicate grace and favour from the Father, and should present our prayers, and bear our names before his Father ; we are secure of our communion with God, by virtue of such a Mediator.

Thus are we *to come to God by Jesus Christ*. But these things will be more fully explained, some of them, when we come to consider the latter part of the words, *He ever liveth to make intercession for them*. Let me conclude at present with making two or three reflections from what has been already said. And,

1. As you have heard what it is *to come to God*, to come unto the Father ; so it behoves us all to consider this seriously, that we may not deceive ourselves in the notion of *coming to God* : for there are many, who do profess to come to God, and to embrace the christian religion, to desire to be informed and instructed in the way of salvation, to worship the true God, and to obey him, and put their confidence in him ; but do not, at the same time, consider that 'tis not enough for us to make a profession of doing these things, unless we really do them. We must have

have a deep contrition on our minds, a deep sense of our guilt, and the misery ensuing thereupon ; or else we shall never be willing to *come to God* with that earnest desire, that *hunger and thirst after righteousness* ^c, and be willing to worship him after the manner he requires. Unless we have deeply considered the evil of sin, and the dreadful consequences of it ; unless we have been charmed with the beauty and excellency of holiness, and our souls powerfully touched with the glorious rewards which are set before us ; we shall never come in a proper manner. If we have not a deep sense of sin, and likewise a proper apprehension of the greatness of the divine love and favour, in inviting poor sinners to be reconciled to God, we shall never have such importunate desires, never be so urgent in our prayers and requests to God ; we shall never put such confidence in him, and hope in his mercy in such a manner as we ought : and therefore *coming to God*, does not only signify to profess the christian religion, but to believe the doctrines of it, after such a manner, that our thoughts, and resolutions and actions be determined thereby. And,

2. As there are great invitations and great promises to encourage us to *come to God*, and to be reconciled to him ; this should engage those who are sensible of their misery, and desire to be truly happy, to accept the invi-

f Mat. 5. 6.

tation, embrace the kind proposal, come to God, and be at peace with him. The terms are the most reasonable that can be ; we are invited with the greatest importunity in the world, and the way is by Jesus Christ. There is a mediator provided : it might be said, Who shall have merit enough to obtain the favour of God ? who shall make a satisfaction for our sins ? Why, all these difficulties are removed, in that there is *a new and living way consecrated*, a mediator established. Jesus Christ has *all power* and authority, and *is able to save to the uttermost, those that come to God by him*.

How deplorable a case is it then, if men, notwithstanding these proposals, will not come to God by Jesus Christ ? It may well be said to such, as it was to the house of Israel of old, *Why will ye die* ^d, when there is a physician able to cure all the maladies of your souls ? Why will you continue at variance with the Almighty, when there is a reconciler, who can put all things into order, who can bring you to God, and render you acceptable in his name ; when there is every thing contrived in your favour, and for your advantage ? O how great will your guilt be, if, after having been *alienated from the life of God*, you will not be *reconciled to him* ^e, notwithstanding all the offers of his favour ! Shall he who is injured ask first, first signify

^d Ezek. 18. 31.

| ^e Col. 1. 21.

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his good will ; and will you continue in rebellion against him ? Shall he stoop so low as to ask you to be reconciled, and send his ambassadors to that purpose ; and yet will you persist in your obstinacy and rebellion against him ? How just and dreadful will the condemnation of such persons be, who *neglect this so great salvation* ? Has God found a way for you to be reconciled ; and will you despise his wisdom, his grace, his bounty, and all this glorious contrivance for your salvation ? Would he be at the expence of the blood of his Son, to procure these blessings for you ; and will you trample upon such blood ? O how great must the guilt of such persons be ; who *hear the joyful sound*, and yet refuse to obey ! who have *the blood of sprinkling* proposed to them, and yet *count it an unholy thing*, and refuse to subject themselves to the methods God has appointed ! who are often besought and intreated by the tender mercies of God in Jesus Christ, that they would *come to him that they might have life* [†], and yet refuse ! But *I hope better things of you, and things that accompany salvation ; tho I thus speak* [‡].

[†] John 5. 40.

| [‡] Heb. 6. 9.





SERMON VIII.

Preach'd at *PINNERS-HALL*, Sept. 13, 1707.

HEBREWS vii. 25.

Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

The third *SERMON* on this text.



I HAVE, in two discourses from these words, considered the apostle's assertion concerning Christ's ability *to save to the uttermost those that come unto God by him*: which is the first thing contained in the text. I now come,

Secondly, To consider the proof of this assertion; the argument upon which it is founded. The article of our Saviour's intercession, is that which the apostle insists on as the argument of his ability *to save those that come to God by him; seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.*

The

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The force of the words amounts to this :
“ Seeing our blessed Saviour, the high priest
“ of our profession, now *ever lives to make*
“ *intercession for us* ; we may conclude, that
“ *he is able to save them to the uttermost, that*
“ *come unto God by him.*” There are many
arguments which prove this : and, in dis-
coursing of Christ’s ability to save, I have
not confined myself to this only, but men-
tioned some others. But as the apostle fin-
gles out this as a special argument to encour-
age our hope ; therefore ’tis proper we
should enter more particularly into the con-
sideration of it. And here we are to con-
sider,

I. The *intercession* of our Saviour, what
it is ; that we may have a just notion
of the matter.

II. The *duration* of his intercession, the
perpetuity of it ; for he is said, *ever to*
live for this purpose, *to make intercession*
for us.

III. The force of this argument to prove
his *ability to save to the uttermost, them*
that come to God by him. We are to
discourse,

I. Of the *intercession* of our Saviour itself.
And here we may consider both the nature
of it, and the necessity of it. And,

1. That we may have a clear and distinct
notion about this matter, we shall consider
the

the nature of Christ's intercession; which we may collect from the use of this word in the holy scriptures. And this may be compared with the use of it in other authors. It is a word we meet with in several places in the new testament; as we shall have occasion to take notice; and it generally signifies, in Greek authors, either to go to a person to treat with him, or to speak with him; to discourse with a person concerning some affair; to negotiate some affair with another person^h. And this agrees with the interpretation of it in the new testament; to *be present with* a person, and to *negotiate* an affair with such an one. So when we come to God by Jesus Christ, we come to him as an intercessor, that he would, as it were, interpose between us and God the Father, who is, in this case, considered as the sovereign judge of the world; that he would mediate for us; that he would be present with the Father, and negotiate our concerns, the interest of our souls. Those who *come to God by him* therefore, must have a general notion of the doctrine of his intercession, as well as of his sacrifice, and must believe it; for this is one part of his priestly office: and, as they apply themselves to him for *the blood of sprinkling* to purify their consciences; so likewise that he would intercede for them, now he is established for that purpose at the right hand of the throne of God.

^h Vid. Steph. Thesaur. in verb. *εἰς τὸ συχᾶν*.

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Sometimes, in scripture, intercession is spoken of as transacted with men ; as we see in Jer. 36. 25. The princes interposed, as having some interest with the king, and some respect to the prophet. But frequently 'tis used for intercession with God ; and good men sometimes are said to intercede with God ; which is in a sense very inferior to what is ascribed to our blessed Saviour. 1 Tim. 2. 1. The apostle declares, he would have *prayers and intercessions made for all men* : that is, to pray to God for them, in order to obtain such favours as they want ; or to avert such judgments as they are in danger of. And in Jer. 7. 16. the word is used to this same purpose : *Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me ; for I will not bear thee.* This people, as if the Almighty should say, I have now abandoned, because of their long impenitency and obstinacy : therefore forbear to stand in the gap to make intercession for them, to obtain favour at my hand ; for I am resolved now the sentence shall be executed, which I have so long pronounced against them. So Isaiah 59. 16. after a complaint of great profaneness and wickedness, 'tis said, *God saw there was no man, and wondered there was no intercessor* : no such person as Abraham, who interceded so earnestly for Sodom : *and wondered that there was no intercessor* ; scarce a man to be found who prayed for the people, who interposed

terposed to avert the divine judgments, and implore God's favour upon them. And thus you will find the word used in other places of the old testament.

But intercession is, in a more especial manner, in scripture ascribed to the priesthood. It is the duty of all good men to intercede for their fellow-creatures : and we are even to *intercede for our enemies ; to pray for them that hate us and despitefully use us*ⁱ : this is the general duty of all christians for their fellow-creatures. But intercession is more especially ascribed to the priesthood : so it was under the law. There was an annual day of atonement appointed when the sacrifice was to be burnt without the camp, and the blood sprinkled before the mercy-seat ; when the high priest went into the holy of holies^k. By comparing this with the new testament, especially this epistle to the Hebrews, you will find this was a type of our Saviour's intercession. And tho our Lord may be said to have interceded upon earth, when he prayed for his disciples, and for his enemies upon the cross ; yet the proper time of his intercession, as a priest, was after his ascension to the right hand of God : for intercession belongs to the glorious part of his priestly office. Now 'tis plain, that the apostle, in this epistle, alludes to this annual day of atonement, and the intercession performed then : *For Christ, says he, is not*

ⁱ Mat. 5. 44.

^k Lev. 16.

entred into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us¹. He is not entred into the holy of holies, into which the high priest under the law entred; but he is entred into heaven itself: for that *holy of holies* was a figure of heaven, the true holy place; and he is entred there, to appear in the presence of God for us. Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entreth into the holy place every year with blood of others^m: it was not so; but once for all he entred into the holy place: For then, says the apostle, must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world; but now once, in the end of the world, hath he appeared, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, &c. Those priests came out of the holy place again the same day they went in; and, after having interceded, there was need to repeat the sacrifices, and their intercession every year upon the same day of atonement. But our Lord has offered but one sacrifice, which was sufficient to expiate our guilt; and is entred into heaven to intercede for us, and there lives till he comes without sin unto salvationⁿ, to save those whose guilt he has expiated by his one oblation. And in the 10th chapter of this epistle, at the beginning, says the apostle: *For the law having a shadow of good things to*

¹ Heb. 9. 24.

^m Ver. 25.

ⁿ Ver. 28.

come, and not the very image of the things, can never, by those sacrifices, which they offered year by year continually, make the comers thereunto perfect. Such as came to God by those high priests, could not be made perfect but with reference to the Messiah, who was to be revealed: For then would they not have ceased to have been offered, because the worshippers, once purged, would have had no more conscience of sins; but in those sacrifices there is a remembrance made again of sins every year, &c. But then compare this with the 11th and 12th verses: for hereby the author of this epistle shews the perfection of Christ's sacrifice. And every priest standeth daily ministering, and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: but this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting, till his enemies be made his footstool. So that 'tis plain, his sitting down at the right hand of God, where he ever lives to make intercession for us, is consequent upon his sacrifice. Thus the priests under the law are said to have made intercession, as types of our blessed Lord and Saviour. The same terms are used to signify their intercession, which was after the sacrifice; and which shewed that God was reconcilable, that he had accepted the sacrifice: for his wrath must be appeased, to make way for this work of intercession.

But

But then again: As this belongs to the priesthood, and particularly to our blessed Lord and Saviour's priesthood, which is infinitely superior to that of Aaron; so we find, Rom. 8. 33, 34. this matter is expressly spoken of: *Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? it is God that justifieth: who is he that condemneth? it is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.* When the apostle had assured those that come to God by Christ, those who believe in him, of their security, in regard of their salvation, *Who is he that condemneth?* says he, *it is Christ that died*; that is, offered a meritorious sacrifice: *yea, rather that is risen again*; which is another argument for our hope: for his being risen from the dead, shews the efficacy of his sacrifice, seeing he was acquitted from the grave; and not only so, but being ascended, *is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us*; that he may guide us by his counsel, till he bring us to his glory. So that 'tis plain, the intercession of our Saviour, properly speaking, as a priest, is consequent upon his sacrifice, after his resurrection and ascension, and belongs to his glorious state. So 1 John 2. 1. *If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.* This same person makes a presentation and plea of his blood, and is our advocate in heaven. Now is the time of his advocacy, since

he is risen from the dead, and ascended thither. And Rev. 8. 3. we read, that *another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar, which was before the throne.* Our blessed Lord is called an *angel*, or *messenger*, as the word signifies; a *messenger of the covenant* °: and expositors generally agree, that our Lord Jesus is here represented as offering up the prayers of the people thro' the incense of his merit, to obtain the blessings they ask at his hands; because he is represented here as a priest: and we know who is the high priest of our profession; and, 'tis very plain, that an allusion is made to the incense taken from the golden altar under the law. In the 53d of Isaiah, which is one of the most celebrated prophecies of our Lord's suffering, and shews what a sacrifice he offered for us, when he was *wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our sins*; 'tis said, *By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities, and he shall make intercession for the transgressors.* He was not only to be wounded for their sins, but to make intercession for them.

'Tis true, that this term of intercession is also used concerning the holy Spirit: Rom. 8. 26. *Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infir-*

° Mal. 3. 1.

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mities ; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought : but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. We must have a distinct notion of the intercession of the holy Spirit, and of our Lord Jesus Christ ; for the intercession of our Saviour is the intercession of a high priest : and there is an allusion to what was done in the old testament upon the day of atonement. And as there is therefore a different notion given us of the work and office of the holy Spirit ; so his intercession for us is to be considered after another manner. It is the part of an intercessor to assist the person who is not so likely to prevail, without being introduced by another who has an interest in the person whose favour he asks. And on this account the holy Spirit may be said to *intercede for us*, because he assists us, and excites in us such petitions as are proper for us to ask of God ; and such a frame of spirit as is proper to those petitions : and so the apostle speaks of *the Spirit's interceding for us*. But in this same chapter he speaks of the intercession of our Lord, as consequent upon his death : and, as the priestly office is ascribed to Christ, and not to the holy Spirit ; we must consider his intercession as that which is agreeable to the priesthood.

Sometimes again, intercession is used *for* a person, and sometimes *against* a person, praying against another, or calling for vengeance upon another, as some of the prophets

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mities ; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought : but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. We must have a distinct notion of the intercession of the holy Spirit, and of our Lord Jesus Christ ; for the intercession of our Saviour is the intercession of a high priest : and there is an allusion to what was done in the old testament upon the day of atonement. And as there is therefore a different notion given us of the work and office of the holy Spirit ; so his intercession for us is to be considered after another manner. It is the part of an intercessor to assist the person who is not so likely to prevail, without being introduced by another who has an interest in the person whose favour he asks. And on this account the holy Spirit may be said to *intercede for us*, because he assists us, and excites in us such petitions as are proper for us to ask of God ; and such a frame of spirit as is proper to those petitions : and so the apostle speaks of *the Spirit's interceding for us*. But in this same chapter he speaks of the intercession of our Lord, as consequent upon his death : and, as the priestly office is ascribed to Christ, and not to the holy Spirit ; we must consider his intercession as that which is agreeable to the priesthood.

Sometimes again, intercession is used *for* a person, and sometimes *against* a person, praying against another, or calling for vengeance upon another, as some of the pro-

phets have done, is call'd in scripture intercession: Rom. 11. 2, 3. *God hath not cast away his people, which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life.* Thus you see, when he complains against them, and prays that God would some way or other remarkably punish them, he is said to intercede against them. So Acts 25. 24. *And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me; or, as it is in the original, have interceded with me^p; both at Jerusalem and here, &c.* This is interposing against a man: so that you see the word intercession is used in this general manner, either to pray for or against another. But when it is spoken of with reference to men, in scripture 'tis most commonly used to signify the prayers of good men to God in behalf of their fellow-creatures. When 'tis used concerning the Spirit, it signifies his assistance of us in our prayers. When 'tis used of the priestly office, especially in the new testament, it signifies something more and different from what it does in other respects. There was a particular time when the high priest interceded for the people, namely, the day of atonement; and there

^p Ἐντυχόν μου.

was a particular place, in the holy of holies. The time of our Lord's intercession is since his ascension into heaven; the place of it is heaven itself; the manner of it is by presenting himself to the Father in our nature: this divine person, having assumed our nature, after having died upon the cross, raises himself from the dead, and ascends into heaven in the same nature, and appears before God for us. And thus as our blessed Saviour appears there himself, so he represents his people; as in the 6th of this epistle to the Hebrews, *ver. 20. Whither the fore-runner is for us entred; even Jesus, made a high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedec.* He is entred there as a priest within the veil, into the highest heavens: he is entred there as our fore-runner; that is, to assure us that *where he is, we shall, in due time, also be.* And if he is entred as our fore-runner, it is as our representative. So that he appears there himself, and appears on our account, as the representative of his people.

It imports, as I have explained to you also, the plea of his blood, as he intercedes and negotiates our concerns in heaven. The Revelation of John informs us in what manner he doth it: *And I beheld, and lo, in the midst of the throne, and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders stood a Lamb, as it had been slain*^a: to signify that our blessed Lord, tho he ever lives, yet he makes a plea of his

^a Rev. 5. 6.

sacrifice ; and so is represented in heaven as *a lamb that had been slain*. This is, as I said before, typified by the high priest sprinkling the blood of the sacrifice before the mercy-seat. 'Tis by the plea of his blood that we are justified ; according to that in Rom. 8. *It is God that justifieth : who is he that condemneth ? it is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again. He is risen again for our justification ; and so ever lives to make intercession for us*. Our justification is indeed owing to the merit of his sacrifice ; but then this merit must be pleaded.

And, farther, his intercession imports the defence and preservation of his church : *For as we are reconciled to God by the death of his Son ; how much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life ?* What life is that ? Why, the life of one who intercedes for us : for he ever lives to this purpose. *I am he that was dead and am alive, and behold I live for evermore ; and have the keys of hell and death^f : have all power in my hand, and can preserve men safe to my heavenly kingdom*. Therefore when we come to God by Christ, as an intercessor, we come by one who can defend and preserve us ; and being reconciled by his death, we shall be saved by his life ; and may therefore, in all our wants, apply ourselves to him, and come boldly to the

^a Rom. 5. 10.

^f Rev. 1. 18.

throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need ^s.

The office of intercessor may also suppose his engaging for the preservation of his people, for *those that come to God by him*; because 'tis not enough that they have entred into covenant with God upon gracious and favourable terms, but they must continue stedfast in his covenant: and thus those who have *made a covenant with him by sacrifice*, as we have done on the account of the sacrifice of our blessed Saviour, must be preserved by his grace. Therefore the apostle Jude gives him the character of *him that is able to keep us from falling* ^t. We are to suppose that he has engaged himself on the behalf of his people; and, as *none can pluck them out of his Father's hand* ^u, so none can pluck them out of his, who is become their surety, as he is mediator, and as he is intercessor: he engages on the part of his Father, and communicates all grace to them.

And then, in the last place, as I have shewn you already, it imports the presentation of their services and of their persons too; according to that in Rev. 8. 3. *Their prayers are offered up with much incense*: they are presented by him, and they are accepted of God in the beloved. Our Saviour tells his disciples, in one of his last discourses with them, that it was *expedient for them that he*

^s Heb. 4. 16.

^t Jude 24.

^u John 10. 29.

should

should go away, that he should ascend into heaven ; the consequence of which would be *the sending another comforter* ^v, or another *advocate*, as the word might be rendered ^w. He would give them the holy Spirit, and himself would pray for them ; that is, he would intercede for them in heaven. We must not suppose it was after the manner he did here upon earth, when he prostrated himself upon the ground, and *offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears unto God* ^x : no ; our intercessor is now represented upon a throne, and intercedes by his constant appearance before God ; presents himself as a lamb once slain ; and as having, by this sacrifice, merited the divine favour for his people, he presents their persons and services to God in such a manner as renders them acceptable to him.

Thus have I shewn you what is signified by our Saviour's intercession.

2. We are to consider the necessity of it. And that will be easily discerned, if we recollect what has been said of this matter.

(1.) Because it belongs to his priestly office. Every part of the priestly function must, of necessity, have been performed by him : for, as our apostle says, *Every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices : wherefore it is of necessity, that this man have somewhat*

^v John 16. 7.

^z Ὁπαρχλντος. Vid. John | ^{2. 1.}

^x Heb. 5. 7.

also to offer ^y. It was necessary for our high priest to have a sacrifice too. The same may be said concerning intercession: if this was a necessary part of the priestly office, it was necessary our high priest should be an intercessor. If he had remained upon earth, he would not have been a perfect priest; for then he would have only performed that part of his office which consisted in offering sacrifice: but his entering into heaven, shews the perfection of his priesthood. So that if we conceive of our Saviour as a priest, we must consider his intercession as a part of his priestly office; and not, as some persons pretend, as belonging to his kingly office. Indeed it is no wonder, that those who deny the necessity of his priestly office as a satisfactory sacrifice to divine justice, deny his intercession as a priest too. But I need not stand to refute this, when I have so plainly proved from scripture, that the intercession of Christ is a part of his priestly office: so that if it be necessary he should be a perfect priest, it is necessary he should intercede.

(2.) This appears necessary for the application of that blood which he sacrificed upon the cross. It was necessary for him in regard of his character, that he should be a perfect priest; and it was necessary for us, because his blood must be applied to our consciences, and it must be pleaded before the throne of God. Our Saviour offered a sacrifice which

^y Heb. 8. 3.

was satisfactory ; but then this must be pleaded. This was typically represented under the law by the sprinkling of the blood before the mercy-seat. And in some cases of legal purification, they were not deemed to be accepted till they were sprinkled with the blood of the sacrifice : and so must we, by the interposition of our Saviour ; by his intercession for us we must have his blood applied to our souls : for, as an intercessor, he sprinkles it before the mercy-seat, and applies to us that great benefit and favour ; so that we are effectually justified.

(3.) And then, by what you have heard of his obtaining blessings for us ; this was necessary for our preservation and support in the present imperfect state. For, as I told you before, it was necessary for the expiation of our guilt that he should die ; and it is necessary he should live to intercede, that we might be preserved. And this is to fortify the souls of his people, who are surrounded with so many temptations in this world : this is a doctrine which tends mightily to their comfort, and therefore seems necessary for them in the state of their pilgrimage ; that tho they are weak, *they know that their Redeemer lives* ², and is *mighty to save* ² ; *able to save to the uttermost those that come to God by him* : that tho Satan attack them with a great deal of artifice, yet the shepherd of

² Job 19. 25.

1 ² Isa. 63. 1.

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Israel *never slumbers nor sleeps*; and greater is *he that is in them, than he that is in the world*^b: that when they are tempted, they have an intercessor at the right hand of God, who knows all things, and therefore knows their souls in adversity; and is intimately acquainted with all their distresses: that when they are tempted, they have one at the right hand of God, who *knows how to succour them that are tempted*; and will, with the temptation, *make a way for their escape, and will render them able to bear it*^c. You see how necessary this doctrine appears for the consolation of the people of God: and thus our Saviour makes use of this argument, to persuade his disciples that they should be content with his absence from earth, because his presence in heaven would be more for their advantage; seeing there he would intercede in their behalf, and procure such benefits for them^d. And thus says the apostle in the Revelation: *I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, who accused them before our God day and night*^e. 'Tis the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, as he is now an intercessor, which administers strong consolation to his people. The devil is called *an accuser*: it is a forensick term. Our Lord is *an intercessor*, in opposition to

^b 1 John 4. 4.

^c 1 Cor. 10. 13.

^d John 14.

^e Rev. 12. 10.

Satan, who is *the accuser of the brethren*: and they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb ^f, and the effectual plea which he makes in interceding with the Father. So that you see, upon these several accounts, 'tis necessary that our blessed Lord and Saviour should intercede for us.

II. The next thing to be considered, is the *perpetuity* and the *continuance* of Christ's intercession. It is asserted, that *he ever lives to intercede for us*. This is to shew,

1. The dignity of our high priest, and the excellency of his sacrifice. For the high priests under the law did not ever live to make intercession; *for they were many, by reason of death* ^g: but *he that was dead is alive, and lives for evermore* ^h. It does not only signify our Lord's power, that he is truly God, and raised himself from the dead; but it signifies the efficacy of his sacrifice, because the bands of death could not hold him. And thus, on the one hand, it shews the dignity of his priesthood, *that he ever lives*: for, as they die, *he is a priest for ever, after the power of an endless life* ⁱ; so, on the other, it discovers the perfection of his sacrifice too.

Again: he must ever live to take away the scandal of the cross. It was a great humiliation of our blessed Saviour, that he would

^f Rev. 12. 11.

^g Heb. 7. 23.

^h Rev. 1. 18.

ⁱ Heb. 7. 16.

die for our offences : and it is not conceivable how he could be humbled more than he was, seeing he endured so many agonies, so many sorrows and torments ; and, at last, death itself. And now it was fit, that as he humbled himself, *he should be highly exalted, and that at his name every knee should bow^k ; bow to the Father in his name, or come to God by him*, as the great intercessor : for this is a part of his exaltation at the right hand of God ; this is the great dignity and glory of his priestly office. Men were offended at him, stumbled at his doctrine, and thought meanly concerning his person, because he died upon the cross ; but they did not consider that he died as a sacrifice, and that by his blood he could make atonement : but now that he is at the right hand of God, this may well take away the reproach of his cross ; for in proportion to his humiliation, so is he exalted : and, if men consider it right, his sacrifice was necessary in order to this intercession ; and therefore the scandal of that may be well rescued hereby. Again,

2. The perpetuity of our Lord's intercession, is to shew that he is the model of our resurrection and of our glorification. We are formed upon this model ; *our vile bodies, at the resurrection, will be fashioned like to his glorious body^l. We shall see him as he is, and shall be like him^m*. Surprizing grace ! that

^k Phil. 2. 9, 10.

^l Chap. 3. 21.

^m 1 John 3. 2.

we should be advanced to a resemblance of our blessed Lord and Saviour. And seeing *he ever lives to intercede for us*, this is a constant assurance that we shall *ever be with the Lord^a*, in the continual enjoyment of the privileges and glory of that blessed state. His *ever living*, shews the constancy of his negotiations: our Lord does not only at certain times present himself, but he constantly negotiates; he never discontinues this great business, this mighty affair, about which he is gone into the state of glory. There is no occasion to doubt of his watching over his people for good; he knows all their wants, and considers all their infirmities, and takes notice of all their difficulties and temptations. It costs him no pain, no sorrow to intercede, tho it did to offer himself a sacrifice: and seeing he makes a constant presentation of himself to the Father, there is hope in all our addresses to him. And,

3. He must constantly intercede for us, that he may be a constant source of our communion with God. Our spiritual life consists in our union with God: now, as we are not able, of ourselves, to support ourselves in such a privilege as this is, our blessed Lord sustains us in it; he is the principle of our communion with God. It is thro' him that we derive all favours from the Father; it is thro' him that we continue in the love of God. He receives benefits to confer upon us,

^a 1 Theff. 4. 17.

as our intercessor, and *sheds abroad the love of God in our hearts* °; and he excites love in our souls to God, and presents our services to him, which are too imperfect to be accepted, but upon account of the interposition of such an intercessor.

III. The last thing, is to shew you, in a few words, the force of the apostle's argument: that *he is able to save to the uttermost, those that come to God by him; seeing he ever lives to make intercession for them.* And who can doubt of this, that considers the nature and extent of our Saviour's intercession? What is there to be imagined that we can want *to save us to the uttermost*, but what we find in the character of our blessed Redeemer? He has sacrificed himself before, and that part is done. And now, seeing he is an intercessor; surely this character, if duly considered, is capable of giving us strong consolation, and good hope thro' grace. There is no danger, no difficulty, no snare, no temptation, which can occur to us, but you see our Lord watches over us, to deliver us from the power of it. There is no service we can present to God, but is accepted: *He offers up the prayers of all saints with much incense* P. God has infinite majesty; and how can we appear before him? This intercessor tempers the rays of the divine ma-

° Rom. 5. 5.

1 P Rev. 8. 3.

jeſty, ſo that we can *ſee God* by faith, and *live*^a; *ſee him who is inviſible*^r; can approach him who is infinitely juſt, thro' the interceſſion of one who pleads his atoning blood, his perfect righteouſneſs before the throne of God. Thro' our Saviour we can preſent ourſelves to the Father with acceptance; he is *bone of our bone, and fleſh of our fleſh*: ſo that whatever might diſcourage us, is removed out of the way; and, we may believe, that he is able and willing to *ſave us to the uttermoſt*, ſince he is our interceſſor. If he had continued in a ſtate of humiliation, we might have doubted whether he could have *ſaved us to the uttermoſt*: but ſeeing *he is exalted above all principalities and powers, and is ſeated at the right hand of God*; ſeeing he is there our mediator, what can diſcourage us? Let us therefore *come with boldneſs to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help us in the time of need*^t; ſeeing we have an interceſſor there, who is, in all reſpects, ſo well qualified.

I will offer two or three reflections on what I have ſaid, and conclude.

1. Thoſe who have been hitherto at a diſtance from God, and are now willing to come and be reconciled to him, may ſee the only way of approach. They muſt come by Jeſus Chriſt, and in conſideration of his

^a Exod. 33. 20.

^t Heb. 11. 27.

^r Heb. 4. 16.

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sacrifice : they must come after the manner which has been explained ; and then the character of an intercessor will give them unspeakable consolation.

2. As for those who have thus come to God by Jesus Christ ; why should they despond and droop, seeing their great intercessor is so well qualified to negotiate their affairs ? There is no opportunity he misses of doing them good ; there is no difficulty but he can surmount, no wants but he can supply : and, as he is the principle of our communion with God, we should address ourselves with a holy confidence in the divine mercy. Seeing we have an intercessor so well qualified, it should encourage our faith ; and the faith which is prescribed us, does not hinder that reverence which is due to the divine majesty.

To conclude : let us improve this privilege and delight in the sacred worship of God, both in private and publick ; seeing, by this means, we have communion with him thro' Jesus Christ, who is the great mediator of the new testament, and *ever lives to make intercession for us.*





S E R M O N IX.

Preach'd at *PINNERS-HALL*, Nov. 8, 1707.

MATT. xi. 11, 12.

Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the baptist : notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven, is greater than he. And from the days of John the baptist, until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

The first S E R M O N on this text.



IT seems probable, by what we find in the beginning of this chapter, that John the baptist being in prison, his disciples inquired of him concerning the doctrine he had preached, relating to the true Messiah ; wherein he had declared, that Jesus of Nazareth was the person : they would now again know of him, *whether this was he that should come, or whether they were to look for*

for another? Upon which John sends them to our blessed Saviour himself, for full satisfaction. Christ appeals to the miracles he had wrought, so as to give them occasion to make a judgment themselves, whether he were the person or not, who was predicted. He does not tell them, in plain terms, that he was the Messiah; but he tells them what miracles were wrought, some of which they themselves were eye-witnesses of^s, and directs them to report these things to John the baptist: *The blind receive sight, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me^t.*

There are indeed some who reckon that John the baptist being in prison, began himself to doubt of the mission of Jesus Christ; and that therefore he sent two of his disciples to inquire, for his own satisfaction. But this does not certainly appear from the context; and therefore, 'tis most probable, that the design of John the baptist, in sending these two disciples, was, that they might satisfy themselves, as well as the rest of his followers, who were in doubt concerning the Messiah. Their expectations were disappointed, in that he had not set up a pompous and temporal kingdom in the world;

^s Luke 7. 21.| ^t Mat. 11. 5, 6.

and therefore they questioned whether he were really the Christ: upon which John very prudently sends them to our Lord himself, for a fuller confirmation. And Christ gives this answer; intimating, that when they gave John an account of the miracles which were wrought, he would from thence satisfy and confirm them in the belief of his mission, if they were willing to receive the truth, and the doctrine he had before preached. For it is not very likely that John should now doubt concerning a person of whom he had so clear an information, and to whom he had given so publick a testimony.

'Tis true, 'tis afterwards said by our Saviour to the multitudes concerning John, *What went ye out for to see? a reed shaken with the wind*? And some think our Saviour here, after an allegorical manner, represents John's weakness; and that he takes occasion from this message, sent by John, to observe, that tho he was a great prophet, yet he was but an impotent man, *a reed shaken with the wind*, now he was under temptation. But there is no just reason, that I know of, so to interpret the text: and we must be cautious of using allegories, when there is no necessity for them. *What went you out into the wilderness to see?* I rather think it is as much as if our Lord had said: "Do you know what person you went to see? When you attended on the mi-

“ nistry of John, you did not go out in such
 “ crouds and numbers for nothing ; it was
 “ not to see the reeds shaken with the wind on
 “ the coasts of Jordan : you went to see
 “ something else ; your curiosity was excited
 “ by something you had heard of him.”
But what went you out for to see ? a man
clothed in soft raiment ? “ Did you go out
 “ to see a man who was to proclaim a tem-
 “ poral kingdom, habited like a courtier,
 “ like a person of great authority ? No ;
 “ you had nothing of this kind to incite your
 “ curiosity.” *Behold they that wear soft clo-*
thing, are in kings houses. But what went you
out for to see then ? a prophet ? “ Is this the
 “ truth of the matter ? Did this move you
 “ to go into the wilderness ? You had heard
 “ there was a prophet there.” And 'tis no
 wonder that this was the current report of
 him : for he indeed was clothed like a pro-
 phet, like Elias of old, clothed with rough
 garments ; and lived an austere life, agree-
 ble to the doctrine of repentance which he
 was to preach. *What went you out for to*
see ? a prophet ? Yea, I say unto you, and
more than a prophet. “ Something more
 “ excellent than a prophet, as 'tis in the
 “ Greek^v ; something which exceeded a
 “ prophet.” *For this is he of whom it is*
written, Behold, I send my messenger before
thy face, which shall prepare thy way before
thee. “ This is he of whom the prophet

^v Περὶ σφόδτερον προφήτη.

“Malachi thus speaks.” Then follows our text : *Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the baptist, &c.*

There is something very important and considerable in these words of our Saviour ; as appears by his prefacing of them with a *Verily I say unto you*. For, when our Lord would awaken the attention of the people after an extraordinary manner ; when he had something of the utmost consequence to deliver to them, and would disengage their minds from any strong prejudice against it, he uses to begin with this preface, *Verily I say unto you*. Nor does he content himself with this ; but having added, in the 13th verse, *For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John* ; he engages them to reflect upon what he said with great deliberation. Says he : *And, if you will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.* “ If you can
“ receive a truth of so great consequence,
“ and which I affirm to you after this solemn manner, *this is Elias, that was to come.*” *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.* Another expression to engage them to a serious consideration of what he had been speaking : which is likewise used in the message delivered to the seven churches of Asia by John the evangelist ; *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.* As much as to say ; “ This

* Mal. 3. 1.

“ concerns

" concerns every man, whoever is capable
" of understanding and reflecting upon what
" is said : let every such person give atten-
" tion to this doctrine, which is of great
" consequence, in order to understand the
" divine will."

In the words of the text, in general, you have these three things.

I. The character of John the baptist given by our Lord : *Among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the baptist.*

II. The character of the disciples of our blessed Saviour, preferred to that of John : *Notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven, is greater than he.*

III. A description of the state of things, from the ministry of John, until the time when our blessed Saviour uttered these words ; an account of the state of things in the land of Judea, where both John the baptist and Christ himself ministred : *From the days of John the baptist, until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.*

I. We have the character of John the baptist : *Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the baptist.* This is agreeable

able to what our Saviour had said a little before, when he affirmed *he was more than a prophet*^x; or, *more excellent* than a prophet. Comparing these things together, our Lord's meaning appears to be, that *among those who were born of women, there was no prophet greater than John the baptist*. And this is spoken by a meiosis; our Saviour speaks less than he means. He says, *He was more than a prophet*; and his meaning is, that he exceeded other prophets who went before him: not only that there was no prophet greater than he, but John was greater than any prophet who went before him. *Yea, I say unto you, more than a prophet*; or, *more excellent than a prophet*.

Here 'tis proper we should consider,

1. The title which is given to this person in the scripture: he is called *John the baptist*.

2. His office as *a prophet*.

3. His permanent character. He was so great a prophet, that *none, who were born among women, were greater: nay, he was more than a prophet*; greater than those who preceded him.

1. His title; *John the baptist*. There is an account given concerning this person, by divers of the evangelists. In the 1st of Luke you have an account of his birth, and of the

^x Mat. 11. 9.

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circumstances of it. An angel appeared to his father Zecharias, as he waited in his turn at the temple, and discovered to him what an extraordinary person should be born of his wife; giving him a particular account of his character. He was not ready to believe this; and was taken dumb, and continued so till the child was born. And you find several other extraordinary occurrences previous to his birth. When the blessed virgin receives a message from heaven likewise, concerning the birth of our blessed Saviour, she makes a visit to Elizabeth, the mother of John the baptist^y; and, upon that occasion, is inspired in an extraordinary manner, and prophecies. And, in the gospel of John, you have this character given of the baptist: *There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the light, that all men thro' him might believe^z. And we are farther told, John bare witness of him; and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me, is preferred before me; for he was before me. And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace^a, &c.* You have an account of him from Matthew, in divers places; which shew the manner of his life, and the ministry to which he was called.

^y Luke i. 40.

^z John i. 6, 7.

^a Ver. 15, 16.

He

He was named *John* by divine appointment: for so was the message of the angel to Zecharias, *that his name should be called John^b*; and so he ordered at the time of his birth. The meaning of it is *gracious*; and it might not only signify that he was graciously given to his parents, at an age when they despaired of a child, but that he was the fore-runner of our Saviour, and was to *preach the grace of the gospel^c*, and to shew men that *the kingdom of heaven was at hand*.

He was called *the baptist*, because he was *sent of God to baptize*; as himself declares: *He that sent me to baptize, said unto me, He upon whom the holy Spirit shall descend as a dove, the same is he^d*. This was the character whereby he should know the Messiah. John the baptist was *sent both to preach and to baptize*: and accordingly we find in his history, that *great multitudes came to him into the wilderness of Judea, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins^e*. But he rejected those who did not appear to be penitent: for the Scribes and Pharisees coming to him, he said to them, *Ye generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance; and think not to say, you have Abraham to your father^f*.
 “ This does not intitle you to baptism; you

^b Luke 1. 13.

^c Acts 20. 24.

^d John 1. 33.

^e Mat. 3. 1, 5, 6.

^f Ver. 7, 8, 9.

" must bring forth fruits meet for repentance."

Some indeed have imagined, that John took up baptism because this was a custom usual amongst the Jews, as 'tis pretended; and that they baptized people who were profelyted to their religion; that the profelytes were initiated by circumcision, by baptism, and by sacrifice. But it does not appear, from any law of God, that ever he ordained that profelytes, that is, such as were persuaded to embrace the Jewish religion, should be baptized: and therefore, if the Jews had such a custom among them, it was of their own invention. And 'tis not likely John the baptist, or our Saviour, would countenance any innovation of theirs contrary to the word of God. John came to recover them from their superstitions: and our Saviour says, that *they had made the commandment of God of none effect by their traditions; and that in vain they worshipped him, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men* ^ε. Besides, the Rabbies of the Jews are not agreed among themselves, whether 'twas necessary to use such a ceremony as this in the initiating a profelyte, or not: and there are none of them whose authority is authentick to us. They are later writers for a considerable time, than those who wrote the gospel of our blessed Saviour; and therefore we have no reason to believe the Rabbies concerning this matter: at least

^ε Mat. 15. 6, 9.

we have no reason to believe that our Saviour, or John the baptist, would have approved of this, if it had been a tradition of theirs.

And 'tis not likely that John would be called *the baptist*, this signifying his character, if he only took up a custom which was in use before. He was a priest by his birth, and a prophet by his office; and is called *John the baptist* because of this ordinance of baptism, which he administered: which would not have been his distinguishing title, if it had been common for the priests to baptize profelytes. Why should he be called *baptist* more than others of them? Besides, he declares, that *God sent him to baptize*^h: and they could not deny but *his baptism was from heaven*ⁱ. Why then, should any imagine, he took it from any tradition of the Jews? Our blessed Lord sufficiently confirms this, that his baptism was from heaven, in that he submitted to it himself. And he who speaks so much against human inventions, would never have countenanced this of John, if it had not been a divine ordinance. His baptism was *from heaven, and not from men*: and we find great numbers were baptized by him, as was our blessed Saviour himself.

2. As to his character as *a prophet*, we find 'tis necessary to conclude he was such an one, because our Saviour says, he was *more than a*

^h John i. 33.

| ⁱ Mat. 21. 25.

prophet. And 'tis certain he prophesied. He foretold the kingdom of the Messiah, declared it was ready at hand : he foretold his own diminution, and the increase and progress of the honour and of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ ; *he must increase*, says he, *but I must decrease*^k : he foretold to the Jews what destruction would befall them, and what a terrible state they would be reduced to, if they did not hearken to the doctrine of repentance : *The axe is laid to the root of the tree*^l ; as if he should say, your destruction is near at hand, if you do not now repent : he told them, that *God would winnow his floor* ; *the wheat should be preserved and gathered, but the chaff should be cast into unquenchable fire*^m ; that God had sent his Son into the world, and he would come to refine and purify his church, and there would be a clear distinction made between the righteous and the wicked ; there would be a reformation of things ; and another sort of a church must be planted in the world than theirs, which was so degenerate and corrupt. But,

3. This is not all : he was not only a prophet, but, *among those that were born of women, there was none greater than he.* He was a more excellent prophet, as the word in the original signifies. Now this may seem strange, that John the baptist should be termed, by

^k John 3. 30.

^l Mat. 3. 10.

^m Ver. 12.

our Saviour, as great a man as ever was born into the world ; nay, he preferred to all the prophets who were before him : especially if we consider the things which follow.

'Tis true, John was a prophet in that he predicted things to come ; and in that he taught, by an extraordinary mission, that men should repent, and accordingly baptized them : a new instituted ordinance was proclaimed by his means, and put in practice. But we have prophets in the old testament who did a great many miracles ; whereas 'tis said of John, *he did no miracle*. He indeed *bare witness to the truth*^a : he testified concerning the Messiah ; but he did not perform any miracle to confirm his doctrine. As you see, John 10. 40, 41. where the evangelist, speaking of our Saviour, says : *He went away again beyond Jordan, into the place where John at first baptized ; and there he abode. And many resorted unto him, and said, John did no miracle : but all things that John spake of this man, were true*. He predicted divers things, which we find to be true ; but he did no miracle. Now this was an eminent character of the prophets under the old testament, that they wrought great miracles : and nothing could give them a greater veneration among the people, than to see them perform such wonderful works in the name of God. You know what a multitude of miracles were wrought by Moses, when he

^a John 5. 33.

brought

brought the people of Israel out of Egypt. Before they removed from that state of bondage, with how many wonderful signs, how many miraculous events, did he prove his mission? When he came into the wilderness, how was that whole nation engaged to attend to the divine law which was published by this great prophet, on the account of the miracles which attended his ministry; a constant series of miracles for about forty years together? After this, God raised them up many prophets, who performed great miracles; and particularly Elias, who not only was extraordinary for his miracles, but also for his translation into heaven. There were other prophets famous and eminent for the establishment of the true religion in the world; but Moses in a special manner: for God was pleased, by his means, to give a new institution to the people of Israel, and to form them as a nation for himself; to govern them by his authority and laws, and to erect his worship after a particular manner, and with peculiar rites and ceremonies among them. And others of the prophets were eminent for reforming the people after they were degenerated, for reducing them from idols to serve and worship the true God; particularly Elias, who was enabled to perform great miracles, in order to turn the hearts of the people after this manner.

Other prophets were famous for the prophecies they wrote, for the extraordinary

discoveries which were given to them ; and, in a special manner, concerning the coming of the Messiah and his kingdom. David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others, were famous for this kind of prophecy : their writings are preserved to us, and make up a considerable part of the scriptures of the old testament.

It may therefore be objected, How does it appear that John the baptist was *a greater prophet* than any of these ; whereas, for miracles, he performed none ? As for the institution of a new religion, indeed John the baptist told them *the kingdom of heaven was at hand* : but he lived under the Jewish œconomy ; and tho he was the fore-runner of the Lord, yet he did not properly establish a new religion in the world. 'Tis true, he brought one ordinance with him, and thereby assured the people there was to be introduced a considerable change of things : but however, as to the body and substance of the Mosaick œconomy, it yet remained under the ministry of John. Nor did he write any book that now makes up any part of the canon of scripture. We have his history, his doctrine, and life written by the evangelists ; but himself has not written one book of the new testament, and therefore he may seem to be inferior to such prophets whose visions make up a part of the sacred canon.

Nay, the objection may still rise higher : for it may be ask'd, How could John appear with that evidence and clearness to be a *prophet*, seeing *he did no miracle* ; whereas other prophets, under the old testament, wrought many ? I answer ; that tho John did no miracle, yet 'twas very evident he was a prophet : he brought sufficient credentials with him. And, farther ; tho upon some particular accounts he may seem inferior to divers of the prophets, yet when things are duly considered, he appears to be a more excellent prophet than any of them.

I shall first treat concerning the evidence of his being a true prophet, tho he did no miracle. For there are various kinds and degrees of evidence. There is a sufficient evidence that John was a prophet, tho he performed no miracle. There are two things which are the special evidences of a man's being a true prophet : the performance of miracles ; and the accomplishment of his predictions.

When such wonderful things are performed, as are past the power of art or nature ; when these have borne a strict examination by unprejudiced persons, here is a sufficient evidence to testify a man to come from God. Or when a man predicts that such and such things shall come to pass, and relates the circumstances clearly, and the time of accomplishment exactly ; and the things are of such a nature that they could not be known to

any but God, and those to whom God should reveal them; and when these predictions are in divers instances; why, reason shews, that the accomplishment of them signifies the man to be a true prophet. And therefore there was a rule given, in the law of God, that prophecies should be examined in this way ^P: not that I think it can reasonably be supposed that ever God permitted any person, who would tempt others to idolatry, to be capable of performing a true miracle; but this direction was given in order to guard the people from impostors, who might do some things to amuse inconsiderate men, and so turn them aside from worshipping the true God. The Jews would have the utmost reason to examine a man with the greatest diligence and care, who should endeavour to seduce them to idolatry, because they had the strongest evidence that 'twas contrary to the will of God, in that their religion was confirmed by a long succession of miracles.

But, I say, tho John the baptist performed no miracle, yet he had sufficient evidence to produce to the people that he was a prophet. The things which he predicted were accomplished; as they confessed in that fore-cited text in John 10. these things declared him to be a true prophet. *And many resorted to him, and said, John did no miracle: but all things that John spake of this man were true.* q.d. "He gave us a true character

^P Deut. 18. 22.

" of

" of the Messiah ; and we find his words
" made good."

But then you'll say, How did the people know John was a prophet before any of his predictions came to pass ? for he no sooner began to preach, but he was revered as such, tho he performed no miracle.

1. I answer : There were several very miraculous and surprizing events which attended the production of this great prophet into the world. He was born of parents of such an age as surpassed the course of nature. There was likewise the vision of an angel, who appeared to Zecharias while in the temple ; as you find in Luke 1. There was the testimony of the blessed virgin herself : and there was the prophecy of Elizabeth, the mother of John the baptist. Zecharias was struck dumb, because he disbelieved the message of the angel concerning him ; and his mouth was miraculously opened, and his speech restored at the time of his birth. You find the angel prophesies of him, and tells his character. *The angel said unto him, Fear not, Zecharias : for thy prayer is heard ; and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness, and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink : and he shall be filled with the holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb^a. Af-*

^a Luke 1. 13, 14, 15.

terwards you have an account of Elizabeth's conception : *Thus, says she, hath the Lord dealt with me, in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men*^r. Then you have an account of the message to the blessed virgin, and her conception of our Lord ; and afterwards of a visit she makes to Elizabeth, who was her cousin : and after this many prophecies concerning the great things which belong to Christ's coming into the world. Here was a considerable number of events which might dispose the minds of the people to hearken to John as a great prophet. Here were various revelations and visions concerning him ; he was produced contrary to all expectation, and above the course of nature : here was a miracle in striking his father dumb, and a miracle in opening his mouth ; and, at the same time, the spirit of prophecy comes upon him, as it before came upon his mother. Here were extraordinary events therefore, which might well engage the attention of the people, to consider what manner of man this should be. But, besides,

2. There were other things concurred in the manner of his life, which greatly confirmed his prophetic mission. He was a man who lived in a very strict and austere manner, and remained a considerable time in the wilderness, *eating locusts and wild honey* : for in the Eastern country there were

^r Luke 1. 25.

a sort of locusts eaten by the people ; and wild honey, such as used to be found in the holes of rocks, or in the trunks of trees. His habit is also described in scripture, to shew that he was *one that came in the power and spirit of Elias* ¹. Elias is described to have been *a hairy man, girt with a leathern girdle* ². So likewise John the baptist had *his raiment of camels hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins*. The doctrine of repentance was what he preached in a special manner ; that men must repent and reform, or else great judgments would befall them. All these things concurring, the manner of his life and of his doctrine agreeing to his condition as a Nazarite, and to the work he came about, to prepare the way for the Messiah ; the people might well judge that he was a prophet, even before they saw his own predictions come to pass. Again,

3. A farther evidence concerning him, was, that our blessed Lord himself confirmed his ministry : for he testified of John, as well as John testified of him. And his coming to submit to the ordinance of baptism from the hand of John, was a loud declaration that he was a prophet : besides the other things our Saviour says, as in the words of our text and context ; that he was *more than a prophet, and a greater than those who were born amongst women*. The words com-

¹ Luke 1. 17.

² 2 Kings 1. 8.

pared together, signify that he was not only as great, but a *greater prophet*, upon some accounts, *than those born among women*. I have shewn you the first thing, namely, how John appeared to the people as a prophet. They all took him for a prophet, tho he did no miracle; there was the evidence of miracles, and the accomplishment of predictions.

But the greater difficulty still remains upon our hands: and that is, tho 'tis evident he was a prophet, by what has been said; yet it does not seem, at first view, so plainly to appear that he was *more than a prophet*, as our context declares. Was not Moses a greater than he, who did so many miracles, and established a new system of religion in the world, by the divine direction; and concerning whom 'tis said, in Deut. 34. 10. *there arose not a prophet since, in Israel, like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face?* Nay, so great a prophet was Moses, that our blessed Saviour himself is compared to him: *A prophet, like unto me, shall the Lord your God raise up unto you among your brethren*. And was not Elias an extraordinary prophet, who performed great miracles, and reformed the people of Israel; and who, after a life spent in these great services, was himself, without passing thro' the gates of death, received up into heaven in a fiery chariot? Were not David and Isaiah very eminent

1 Deut. 18. 15.

men,

men, who saw Christ's day so clearly, that they spake of the very circumstances of his sufferings on the one hand, and his glory on the other? They had a clear view, tho' afar off, both of his suffering and his exalted state: and is John the baptist greater than these?

I answer: That we are not to understand these words absolutely, as if in every particular circumstance John the baptist was a greater prophet than any of those under the old testament. As to miraculous performances, 'tis evident there were many surpass'd him; for he did no miracle at all. As to predictions concerning the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, as well as his suffering state; many of the prophets seem to speak more largely than any thing that is recorded of John. As for the institution of a new religion, he is not to compare with Moses on this account. As to reformation, indeed he was eminent; for a considerable number of people seem'd to become penitent by his means.

But John the baptist was *more than a prophet*, in regard of his being the immediate fore-runner of the Messiah himself; which is a place of greater dignity than any of the former prophets had obtained. Things are brought to perfection gradually. The state of religion, in the time of the patriarchs, was not advanced to that degree which it arriv'd at in the time of Moses. The cause
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of religion still gained more ground when the prophets had accomplished their predictions, and the people were returned from the Babylonish captivity. And now there was to be a new institution, in a little time the kingdom of the Messiah was to take place ; and therefore John preaches, *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand* ^u : that is, the state of the church, which had been predicted in the old testament, that kingdom is now at the door. John was the person who proclaimed this, as the fore-runner of Christ. The prophet Isaiah represents him as *the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths strait* ^v. When great persons march with a considerable retinue, and especially when they will have extraordinary honours done them ; persons are employed to level the ways, and to make the roads good and convenient. So here ; *Every hill shall be made low, and every valley exalted* ^w. By the way, this is an express prophecy concerning the Messiah, as appears by the application of it to Jesus Christ in the new testament ; and here, in the 3d verse, he is called *the Lord*, and *our God* : and therefore from this place may be easily proved the divinity of our blessed Saviour. Now John's business was to do this, to prepare and dispose the minds of the people, by his doctrine, to humble and

^u Mat. 3. 2.^v Isa. 40. 3.^w Ver. 4.

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mortify their pride, and to encourage and comfort those who were lowly. He lets them know that 'twas a glorious dispensation which was arriving, 'twas the kingdom of heaven; and therefore there must be a great deal removed out of the way; mens minds must be greatly reformed; they must part with their sins, and subdue their passions: and this was the way to prepare their souls for the coming of Christ. *The crooked things were to be made strait, and the rough places plain.*

There was an eminent prophecy concerning John the baptist likewise, which shews that he had the character of a great prophet; in Mal. 3. 1. *Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple; even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in. I will send my messenger; that is, John the baptist. John is called the messenger of Christ; and Christ is called the messenger of the covenant.*

Again: another prophecy of John the baptist you have in Chap. 4. 5. *Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord, &c.* Our Saviour, when he had spoken of John's illustrious character in the words of the text, assures us that this prophecy was fulfilled concerning him: *And, if ye will receive it, this is Elias which was for to come*^x. Malachi

^x Mat. 11. 14.

had said of him, that he should *turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers*¹. And the angel tells his father Zecharias, that this prophecy should be fulfilled in him; that *he should go before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just*.

It may here be inquired, how it comes to pass our Saviour says, *This is Elias*; whereas, when the Jews inquire of John whether he was Elias, he says no? How are these things to be reconciled together? John 1. 21. *They ask'd him, Art thou Elias? and he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? and he answered, No.* Yet our Saviour says, *This is Elias*.

It appears, that the Jews had the Pythagorean notion concerning the transmigration of souls; and therefore they were ready to think the same concerning Christ as concerning John, that *one of the old prophets was risen again*², and did appear in him. And that they had this notion, seems plain from the question they ask'd our Saviour concerning the man born blind: *Did this man sin, or his parents, that he was born blind*³? They would never have ask'd such a question if they had not supposed he was capable of sinning before he was born; that is, before

¹ Mal. 4. 6.

² Luke 9. 8.

³ John 9. 2.

he was born this time : for they supposed one soul might have inhabited divers bodies. When the Jews therefore ask'd John, *whether he was Elias* ^b? John might very well answer, no : he was not that person ; for it is very likely they imagined that the soul of Elias might inhabit another body, for a time, in this world, to perform some great message. And they seemed to understand, in a literal sense, the coming of Elias from that prophecy in Malachi ; that it should be the same person, the same soul at least. Whereas our Saviour, when he says, *John was Elias*, means he was the person who resembled Elias. For, as it was in the time of that prophet, so when John the baptist came, religion was almost come to nothing ; when the rulers, and Scribes and Pharisees were become extremely corrupt, and imposed their own traditions upon the people, instead of the law of God. Elias led a very austere life, and lived much in the wilderness ; and his habit, and manner of life did much resemble that of John the baptist. And therefore he might well be prophesied of under that name, to signify he should be like that person.

Now I say, considering the dispensation under which John lived, and that this was his character, that he was the immediate fore-runner of our Lord Jesus Christ ; he appears to have been dignified above the rest of the prophets. And, for the same reason,

^b John 1. 21.

that

that *the least in the kingdom of heaven was greater than John*, because in a higher and more glorious dispensation ; John, as being in the suburbs of this kingdom, was in a higher dispensation than any of the prophets before him.

Again: 'tis to be considered, that John the baptist was extremely dignified in this, that he did not only *prepare the way* for the Messiah, but was his contemporary ; conversed with him, nay indeed, baptized him. This was an extraordinary honour to John, that he should administer this ordinance to our blessed Redeemer himself. He not only saw the Messiah, and conversed with him ; not only acquainted the people with his character, and, pointing at him, said, *Behold the lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world*^c ; but by his hands was our blessed Lord himself baptized in Jordan. And, on this account, he may be said to be *greater than other prophets*. Thus as the virgin-mother of our Lord was said to be *blessed above women*^d ; so might John be said to be blessed and honoured *above other prophets*.

Again : The wonderful success of the ministry of John the baptist, makes it appear that he was an extraordinary prophet ; and justly distinguishes him from those who went before him. As he declared the truth con-

^c John 1. 29.

1. ^d Luke 1. 28.

cerning the Messiah, and declared more plainly those great truths which belonged to the Mediator ; so likewise there was a greater success attending his ministry, than we read accompanied that of any of the prophets who were before him. Indeed, in the time of Moses, the people seem'd to be willing to engage in the form of religion and worship which he published ; but you find how often they revolted ; and it appears there were but few of them who were truly devout and religious. In the time of Elias there were some, whom God had preserved, who had not bowed the knee to Baal ; and there was some reformation from idolatry : but how few, in comparison, seem'd to be devoted to the service of the true God, with all their hearts ? But John the baptist came *in the power and spirit of Elias*, but with greater success. The people were all convinced that John was a prophet, and multitudes were baptized by him. Indeed afterwards he *decreased*, and Christ *increased* ; but, at the beginning of his ministry, his success was wonderful : *Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, went out to be baptized of him* ; that is, very great numbers of people. We find often, that the Jews resisted the prophets and their counsel, and put them to death : but here was an extraordinary success, which John's ministry had upon their hearts. John had a greater portion of the Spirit of God accompanying his ministry, to persuade
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the minds of men, and to engage them to obey his doctrine. So that, upon these accounts, he appears to have exceeded the other prophets.

The next thing I should come to consider, is, That notwithstanding this, *he that is least in the kingdom of heaven, is greater than John*, as great as he appears to be. This is the character of the disciples of our blessed Redeemer; *the least among them is greater than John the baptist*. But this I must leave to another opportunity.





SERMON X.

Preach'd at PINNERS-HALL, Nov. 15, 1707.

MATT. XI. 11, 12.

Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the baptist : notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven, is greater than he. And from the days of John the baptist, until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

The second SERMON on this text.



HAVING discoursed of the character our Saviour gives us of John the baptist, that *among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than he* ; I proceed to consider,

II. The character of the disciples of our Lord, as preferred to that of John ; how, notwithstanding the dignity of John the baptist above all the prophets who went before

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him,

him, *he that is least in the kingdom of heaven, is greater than this great person.* At first sight it might have seemed strange that John the baptist, *who did no miracle*, and whose writings made up no book of the holy scriptures, as those of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others did, how he should be accounted *greater* than any of those prophets. But that has been explained to you. Now a new wonder arises in what our Saviour says, that *he who is least in the kingdom of heaven, is greater than John the baptist.* And here it will be proper for us to consider,

1. What is signified by *the kingdom of heaven.*

2. Who is, by our Saviour, termed *the least in the kingdom of heaven.*

3. How *he that is least in the kingdom of heaven, is greater than John the baptist.*

1. We are to consider what is signified by *the kingdom of heaven.*

The kingdom of heaven is an expression very frequently used in the new testament. John preach'd, saying, *Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*^e. And our Saviour often speaks of those who should be *great*, and those who should be *least in the kingdom of heaven*^f. *The kingdom of heaven* is likewise represented under various figures in the para-

^e Mat. 3. 2.

1 ^f Chap. 5. 9.

bles of Christ : it is said to be *like to ten virgins, five wise, and five foolish* ^g; *like to a net cast into the sea* ^h; *like a merchant-man, seeking goodly pearls* ⁱ; &c. In all which parables our Lord represents the state of things under the dispensation of the gospel. 'Tis true, that sometimes *the kingdom of God*, or the *kingdom of heaven*, signifies the state of glory : but most commonly, in the new testament, it signifies the state of grace, which is a state preparatory to that of glory ; a state under the regulation and reformation which our Saviour has made. This is called *the kingdom of God*, and *the kingdom of heaven* ; as may plainly appear from those parables in Mat. 13. and elsewhere. For, in the world above, there is no *sowing the seed of the word* to convert men : but this represents the state of things during the administration of grace. There are no *foolish virgins* in the kingdom of glory : but, during the state of the kingdom of grace, there are people who profess the true religion, some of whom have but the *form of godliness*, and *want the power* ^k ; whereas others have the power as well as the form of it.

It was of this state of things that John spake, in a special manner, when he said, *The kingdom of heaven is at hand*. And our blessed Saviour frequently speaks in the same manner. And thus we must understand our

^g Mat. 25. 1.

^h Chap. 13. 47.

ⁱ Ver. 45.

^k 2 Tim. 3. 5.

text of the kingdom of grace : for it would be no such wonderful thing, nor would it need such a strong asseveration as our Saviour gives it, to gain credit that *the least in the kingdom of glory* should be *greater than John the baptist*. It is enough to say, that all men, except our Lord Jesus Christ himself, have imperfections and sins during their abode in this world ; which renders the condition of the best here, by far less considerable than that where *the spirits of just men are made perfect* : and therefore we must understand this concerning the kingdom of grace.

This sense is more fully confirmed by the words which follow : *For from the days of John the baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force*. This could not be so well said of the kingdom of glory. *From the days of John the baptist until now*, a way was preparing for men to get into the evangelick state. *And the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force*. This is said to represent after what manner men would endeavour to obtain the privileges of that state. And this is farther explained in Luke 16. 16. *The law and the prophets were until John*. The dispensation of the law was given by Moses, and then the prophets followed after : since that time here was a new epocha and state of things. *Since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it* : that is, a great number of people have
now

now their thoughts engaged concerning the kingdom of God, and seem desirous to enter into this new state of things. This is the same with the *kingdom of heaven* in our text, which *suffereth violence*. The saying, *Every man presseth into it*, seems to be the same thing with what our Saviour says concerning its *suffering violence, and the violent taking it by force*.

This matter being stated, that the kingdom of heaven signifies in our text the state of grace, the dispensation of the gospel; 'tis proper to explain, in the next place, the propriety of this expression, and the reason why this state of things, under the gospel, is called *the kingdom of heaven*.

'Tis called *a kingdom*: and, to express the nature of it, and its preference to other dispensations which were before, 'tis called *the kingdom of heaven*.

'Tis called *a kingdom*: for a kingdom being one form of government, may be taken in general to represent a regular and orderly state of things. The dispensation and state of things which our Saviour has ordained under the gospel, is regular and orderly. 'Tis not a state of anarchy and confusion: men are not left to do what is right in their own eyes, but are ordered and disposed in a certain way and form of government which our Saviour has instituted in his church, and ought to be complied with by every one who is willing to be his disciple. The church of

Christ is not a tumultuous society, gathered together after the manner that the people were, of whom we read, in the Acts of the apostles at Ephesus, that *the greatest part knew not wherefore they were come together*¹. When there was a popular commotion and disturbance, curiosity led them together, tho the greatest part knew not the occasion. No; Christ has ordained that his church should be a regular society: 'tis a well-ordered kingdom and government. Men are to know the rules by which they are to be governed; and there are therefore laws which belong to this kingdom. 'Tis a state of things that is fitly adapted to the great end and purpose for which he has designed it; namely, to render men happy here and for ever. And therefore, whatever has been charged upon the church of God, 'tis the best constituted and the most orderly community in the world; and is adapted to render any human society or constitution happy to as great a degree as they are capable of. If the laws and regulations of christianity were universally to obtain, how happy would mankind be? If every one *sought not so much his own interest, as the interest of Christ*^m; if men *laid aside all anger, wrath, malice, evil speaking*ⁿ; and evil surmising too; if they would forego all revenge, and *leave vengeance to God, to whom it belongs, and who will repay it*^o; if

¹ Acts 19. 32.^m Phil. 2. 21.ⁿ Eph. 4. 31.^o Heb. 10. 30.

they

they would *do to others what they would have others do unto them* ^p; if they counted all mankind their neighbours; if they *went about doing good* ^q, and delighted in those excellent rules of charity which the institution of our blessed Saviour recommends; what a happy world would it be? The rules and laws of the christian religion are very agreeable to human society, and will promote the interest of it; and do exceed all human laws and constitutions whatsoever. Human laws can only respect the manners of men, and dispose them to act things which are for the good of society: but christianity reaches the heart, governs the mind, and prescribes laws to the conscience; so that the *tree being good*, the *fruit* may appear to be *good* also ^r.

But the state of christianity is called *a kingdom*, not only because it is a regular and orderly state of government, but because of the particular form of its government; for 'tis indeed a monarchy. And tho an absolute monarchy is a form of government not safe for any human society, because of the frailties and vices, and evil passions of men; yet this is the best government of all, when the monarchy is perfect: and our Saviour being the governor, and he knowing infinitely well what is for the advantage of his subjects, and having infinite power to protect and defend them, and being infinitely merciful and ready

^p Mat. 7. 12.

^q Acts 10. 38.

^r Mat. 7. 17.

to bestow all privileges upon them, and infinitely just, so that there can be no injury done to any under his government with impunity; on these considerations, I say, this must be the most happy constitution in the world, because we have the security of so excellent a monarch, and who continues *the same yesterday, to day, and for ever*^f. For we are not to change our head. As he is a *high priest that continues ever*^g; so he is a king who continues for ever. *His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom; and of his government there shall be no end*^h.

It may be termed *a kingdom* likewise, in regard of the great privileges and advantages which accrue to men thereby. For so 'tis in government amongst men in general; there are considerable advantages accruing to the people: as there are laws to oblige the subjects to duty and obedience; so there are advantages and privileges to be enjoyed by them. As we pay taxes; and as we, by our persons, and by our estates, and by our interest, do what we can for the support of that government under which we live; so likewise that government owes protection to us, and gives us such privileges and advantages as make it worth our while to endeavour the support of it: so that here are mutual obligations. But tho we can lay no obligation upon our blessed Saviour, yet we have the

^f Heb. 13. 8.

^g *Chap. 7. 21.*

^h Dan. 7. 14.

greatest privileges and advantages given us by him, and much greater than are to be expected in any civil government whatsoever. In his kingdom things are so ordered, not only that we should be protected by his power; for he has arms to defend his people, he is able to save them, and preserve them from all their enemies: 'tis not only that we should enjoy the security and safety of our persons, and that we should have various other privileges consequent thereupon; but so is his government ordered, that all his subjects are, in a sort, kings. And 'tis *a kingdom of priests*: for they are *priests and kings*; as 'tis explained by the apostle Peter: *a royal priesthood, an holy nation, and a peculiar people* ^u. And our Lord says, they are to rule and reign with him: *They that overcome, must sit down with him in his throne*, in the kingdom of glory; *as he overcame, and sat down with his Father in his throne* ^v. Well may it be called *a kingdom*, when the subjects of it are, in some sort, princes; as they are allied to our Lord Jesus Christ, and as they are made his favourites. As kings have their favourites, whom they exalt to stations of great dignity and power, so our Saviour exalts all his subjects; makes them *kings and priests* ^w; gives them not only a state of immunity, but advances them to this dignity and honour.

^u 1 Pet. 2. 9.

^v Rev. 3. 21.

^w Chap. 1. 6.

But

But as 'tis termed *a kingdom*, so 'tis called *the kingdom of heaven*; and this first in regard of the author of this kingdom, who is God. 'Tis not constituted according to the kingdoms of this world; according to those forms which men have invented, and those politicks by which they govern. *In the days of those kingdoms*, as the prophet Daniel speaks, when he treats of the monarchies of the world, *shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom* *. And the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ is begun in the world: this kingdom, the state of grace, was set up under the fourth monarchy, while the Roman government obtained in the world; and this kingdom of our blessed Saviour has prospered and prevailed so as to overcome the hearts of many, and to baffle the power of the Roman empire itself. When one reads the gospel, and considers the doctrines and the morals of it, its excellent constitution, and the account which it gives concerning the person and offices of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the duties and privileges of christians; there is reason to acknowledge that God is the author of it. Men could never have invented such a scheme and system of religion. And then, the miracles which have been wrought for its confirmation, and the prophecies which have been accomplished concerning it, do abundantly evince that God is the author of this kingdom. And, indeed, since it has pre-

* Dan. 2. 44.

vailed in the world, contrary to the expectations of men ; since it has prospered under adversity and persecution, and against the policy of the world : this is an evident indication that 'tis *the God of heaven* who has *set up this kingdom* ; that the Almighty has established it, who works upon the hearts of men, and disposes of their minds and consciences as he pleases.

But, farther : As 'tis called *the kingdom of heaven* in regard of its author ; so in regard of its end and tendency : not only does it lead men to the kingdom and state of glory, but likewise this is the immediate dispensation which precedes that of glory. *The law and the prophets were until John*^y ; and John's dispensation endured for a while, but it decreased and gave way to that of the Messiah. But the Messiah's kingdom, his dispensation endures for ever ; he established the kingdom of heaven in the world : for this dispensation of the gospel leads men directly to heaven ; there is no higher dispensation to be established in the world : and therefore these things are spoken of promiscuously. As the state of glory is called *the kingdom of heaven*, so is the state of grace. The apostle speaks to the Ephesians of our enjoying *spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ*^z ; and argues from thence, that since christians are arrived at such an excellent state, they should

^y Mat. 11. 13.

^z Eph. 1. 3.

have their conversation in heaven. And the author to the Hebrews says, *We are come to mount Sion, to the city of the living God; to the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels; to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven; and to God, the judge of all; and to the spirits of just men made perfect^a: that is, we are to come to the heavenly state.* When he speaks of the œconomy of the law, and the ceremonies of it, he speaks of them as *carnal and earthly things, comparatively; whereas he says, the heavenly things must be purged by better sacrifices^b.* What many prophets and righteous men longed to see and hear, and did not, these are discovered to us under the gospel. Those sublime truths concerning the incarnation of our blessed Saviour, concerning his atoning sacrifice, concerning his resurrection, his ascension, the effusion of his holy Spirit, the efficacy of his grace, and the certainty of his *coming, in the fulness of time, with his reward with him, and his work before him^c*; these are so plainly explained to us in the gospel, and the mysteries of grace so unfolded, that there is an infinite disproportion betwixt what is now revealed and what was formerly under the dispensation of the law; because things were then covered with types and shadows, and mystical predictions: whereas now we are

^a Heb. 12. 22, 23.

^b Chap. 9. 23.

^c Isa. 40. 10.

said, *with open face, to behold the glory of the Lord*^d.

And the same which is said concerning the doctrines of christianity, may be said concerning its morals. Such are the excellent motives to prepare and dispose men to an extraordinary degree of holiness and purity, that it were to be expected that the christian church should be like *the kingdom of heaven*, for the purity of the manners of the people. How much were it to be wished, that the evangelick state answered things so; and that those who make a profession of the name of Jesus, by their conversation shewed that this was a heavenly dispensation! The design of it is to raise mens minds above temporal things, and to engage them to *place their desires and affections above*; to *purify and refine their hearts and imaginations*: and if the rules and precepts of the gospel were observed, it would appear indeed to be *the kingdom of heaven*. Its end and design is to lead men to the state of glory; and, in order to this, to prepare them for it, by making them conformable to that state.

Upon these accounts is it called *the kingdom of heaven*. There is no new dispensation of things to be expected; but the end of this dispensation of grace will be that of glory. And thus 'tis spoken of but as one dispensation; since the kingdom of grace, and that of glory, belong both to Christ, are erected

^d 2 Cor. 3. 18.

by the same Messiah. And indeed that kingdom of grace which he has established, when it comes to its full maturity, will be ripened into glory : and as he now calls it *the kingdom of heaven*, he will then, by its purity and glory, make it appear to be such.

2. We are now to consider what is meant by *the least in the kingdom of heaven*.

This must be understood either of the least person in the state of grace, a person of the lowest degree or rank in the church of God ; or the least who is a minister or prophet, because our Saviour is speaking concerning greater or lesser prophets before ; or else this must concern the apostles and immediate followers of Christ, who had an extraordinary commission from him, and were enabled to do miracles at that time when our Saviour spake.

As to this last : if, by *the least in the kingdom of God*, we understand the least of those ministers whom our Saviour qualified to perform miracles while he was in the world, *that the least of these was greater than John* ; then it means that they were arrived to a higher and more excellent state than John. They performed miracles, whereas John did not : and that was not all ; but they had a farther discovery, from our Saviour's mouth, of the mystery of his kingdom, than ever John had.

If it be understood of those ministers in general, who should live under the dispensation

sation of the gospel ; then it may have regard not only to those who lived in the primitive time, when the holy Spirit was poured forth after an extraordinary manner, but to others in successive generations ; who also, in regard of their condition, station, and employment, might, in a very proper sense, be said to be *greater than John the baptist*. These were persons who partook more largely of the privileges of this kingdom, and could preach the gospel after such a manner as transcended what John was capable of doing.

Or, in the last place, if it be understood of the least believer in the gospel-church ; why this, on some accounts, may be made to appear, that *the least of these is greater than John the baptist* ; that is, is greater, in respect of the dispensation, as John was greater than the prophets before him. Not that he did miracles like them, or instituted a new religion like them ; not that his history or prophecies make an intire book, like some of the writings of the prophets ; but because of the excellency of the dispensation, and his express declaring what the prophets were not capable of understanding so well as he. Thus, tho the least believer in the gospel-church is very inferior to John, upon other accounts ; yet, with respect to the clearer light and greater privileges of the dispensation he is under, he may be said to be preferred before him.

But I rather chuse to interpret these words with reference to those who *minister* under the dispensation of the gospel: for our Saviour is speaking of prophets, of those who were employed in this service, and sent of God to instruct the people. Now, says he, *The least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John the baptist*. And this will appear to us by divers considerations.

Let it be supposed that our blessed Saviour, when he speaks of *the kingdom of heaven* in a special manner, speaks of that state of things which followed his ascension into glory: for then he established his kingdom in a special manner; *then was the prince of this world cast out*^e; then was the kingdom of Satan, in a sort, subverted, when our Saviour *triumphed openly upon the cross*^f. Soon after this he rises from the dead, and ascends into heaven; and his Spirit is poured forth after an extraordinary manner: and now *the least*, under this state of things, *was greater than John the baptist*.

(1.) It was so in regard of their knowledge of the truth. If we compare what the apostles of our Saviour believed after his death, with what they did before, we shall find their knowledge was wonderfully improved. Christ himself complains of their being *slow of heart to believe* before^g: and it is evident, by the fears which were upon them when

^e John 12. 31.

^f Col. 2. 15.

^g Luke 24. 15.

our Lord was crucified ; and by their readiness to conclude almost that all hope was gone, when they said, *We trusted this had been he that would have redeemed Israel*^h. We may know, by this, how little they understood of the mystery of the christian religion, in comparison of what they did afterwards, after the effusion of the holy Spirit, whereby they were so capable of advancing the knowledge of the gospel. See what the apostle Peter says, in his epistles, concerning the sufferings of Christ ; and see how great a difference there is in his knowledge. And if the immediate disciples of our Lord, upon the account of the instructions, and other advantages they had from Christ himself, when they conversed with him, were to be preferred before John ; how much were they to be preferred before him and his dispensation when their minds were illuminated, and so great grace was upon them as after the effusion of the holy Spirit ? And indeed *the least in the kingdom of heaven*, the least minister who lives under the dispensation of the gospel, may be supposed to know more than John the baptist. For we have the sayings of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the commissions he gave to his disciples ; we have the doctrines of the apostles themselves laid for a foundation of the christian religion in the world : and here we have things more plainly revealed to us than were in the

^h Luke 24. 21.

time of John the baptist, even by that great minister. He could say, *Behold the lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world*ⁱ; but we can say, *Behold the lamb of God, that has taken away the sin of the world*; that has shed his precious blood for sinners. John could say, *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*^k: but we can say, *Repent now, for the kingdom of heaven is come*; and that glorious dispensation is that under which we live. John could reveal to the people some notions of the Messiah which were true; but nothing that is comparable to what we have in the writings of the apostles, who were so extraordinarily inspired by our blessed Redeemer.

(2.) As it was for knowledge, so for the evidence and proof of the truth of things; Not only are things more clearly explained, but there is a greater evidence, by a greater number of miracles, and a greater number of prophecies accomplished, than in the time of John. The apostles refer to abundance of passages in the prophetic writings; and to the miracles which were wrought. And our Saviour says, *If ye believe, ye shall see greater things than these*^l. Again,

(3.) It was so in regard of the efficacy of the divine grace upon the minds of men. There was something very remarkable indeed in the success of John's ministry; but there

ⁱ John 1. 29.

^k Mat. 3. 2.

^l John 1. 50.

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was much more in the ministry of the apostles, when the Spirit was poured forth: not only a multitude of the Jews, but Gentiles were converted. Those who were brought to repentance by John's ministry, do not appear to have been thorowly turned. But after Christ was crucified, there was a wonderful conversion; and greater grace was implanted in the minds of people, to bring them to an evangelic repentance. *The law was given by Moses; but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ*^m. There was *more grace*, as well as *more truth*. And as the apostles and first ministers of christianity differed mightily from themselves after they had received the holy Spirit; so certainly the work of the holy Spirit, under the dispensation of the gospel in ordinary times, exceeds what the ministration of John could arrive to. *The kingdom of God is within you*ⁿ, as our Saviour says: that is, "The power of the divine government appears in the renovation of your hearts, by rendring you conformable to my doctrine and example."

Thus have I shewn you, that *the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John the baptist*.

I now come to the last thing, viz. The description of the state of things, from the ministry of John, unto the time when our Saviour uttered these words; *The kingdom of*

^m John 1. 17.

ⁿ Luke 17. 21.

heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force: but this must be reserved to another time. Let me make a few reflections upon what you have heard, and so conclude.

1. As what has been said shews that the dispensation of the gospel is the last and best dispensation, and therefore called *the kingdom of heaven*; so it should inspire us with thanksgiving to the Almighty, that he has cast our lot under so excellent an administration. We have the things which *the prophets and righteous men spake of, and longed to see, and yet did not* °. Moreover, it shews us our danger, *if we neglect so great a salvation* as this ^p; and don't improve a dispensation which raises us so high above what was in the time of the prophets, or of John. The christian church is eminently termed the bride of our Saviour; *the bride, the lamb's wife* ^q. John was *the friend of the bridegroom* ^r, and he directed to Jesus Christ; he *prepared the way for him*. But the christian church is a more excellent state; and therefore called *the kingdom of heaven*. The more excellent the dispensation is, the higher obligation are we under to adore the divine goodness; and the more dangerous will it be to offend against so much grace and love. As we have greater opportunity of knowledge,

° Mat. 13. 17.

^p Heb. 2. 3.

^q Rev. 21. 9.

^r John 3. 29.

and the promise of the assistance of the divine Spirit ; as we have the most excellent precepts, and the most endearing motives imaginable ; what account shall we render to God if we despise this day of grace, which is the last state of things ? There will be no other gospel, no greater mediator than our Lord Jesus Christ, no other Saviour : things are come to a maturity ; the gospel-church is *the kingdom of heaven*. Now we are to *work while it is day*¹, and to seek an everlasting interest in this kingdom : for if we neglect this administration of grace, no other will be afforded us.

2. If this be so excellent a state of things, and called *the kingdom of God*, and *the kingdom of heaven* ; how much is it to be lamented, that the piety and holiness of those who profess the christian religion, does not more recommend it under this excellent character ! The primitive christians recommended it by what they did and suffered, They shew'd their hope was in heaven, by their holy conformity to the doctrine and example of their Lord ; and by their contemning sufferings and death for the sake of the truth. It were to be wish'd that *our conversation* likewise was *more in heaven*, from whence we expect our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ².

3. After how heavenly a manner should our worship be performed ? With what so-

¹ John 9. 4.

² Phil. 3. 20.

lemnity? with what intention of mind? with what application of heart to the divine service? with what a regard to the presence of God, seeing the dispensation of the gospel is called *the kingdom of heaven*? We are to imagine ourselves in the suburbs of heaven, as it were; and to set before us the pattern of the holy angels, and *the spirits of just men made perfect*; and endeavour to imitate them, by the spirituality of our performances. And this shews how pure we should keep the divine worship from the inventions of men, and their innovations: for whatsoever some may pretend of a great number of ceremonies, as if these would excite their devotion; since God has not seen fit to institute them, we should content ourselves with those ordinances and rites which he has given us. And tho a great number of ceremonies of God's institution was agreeable to the law, yet now the gospel state is come, we have a new and spiritual state of things, and divine truths are more clearly explained to us; the church is come to a greater maturity, and has not need of those things which belonged to it in its minority. And as it is plain, from the regulation God has made of things under the gospel, that he has judg'd that a simple and plain manner of worship is best suited to the spirituality of this dispensation; so it is very evident, that the great number of ceremonies which human invention has introduced into the worship

ship of God, have a tendency to hinder men from that attention they should give to spiritual doctrine, rather than to excite true devotion in their minds.

4. This should engage persons to aspire, if they have not a place in the church of God ; if they have not made a solemn profession of Jesus Christ, and submitted to his ordinances ; to aspire, I say, after this privilege. For who would not have an interest in the church of God, under an administration which is properly called *the kingdom of heaven* ; a state of things which is so full of grace now, and that will issue in so much glory hereafter ? Sure 'tis worth the while to be resolved to have an interest in the church of Christ, and *a name and a place there.*

5. Seeing the gospel-dispensation, even as it now is, very justly bears the excellent character of *the kingdom of heaven* ; how glorious will that state of things be, which is spoken of in the latter days, when multitudes of converts shall be brought in ; *when they shall fly as a cloud, and as doves to their windows* ?

Lastly, How glorious will that state be which shall endure for ever ? when we shall be free from all sin and sorrow, free from every thing which may disturb our joy and glory ; and receive every thing which shall extend our bliss and honour to the highest perfection of which we are capable ?



SERMON XI.

Preach'd at PINNERS-HALL, Nov. 29, 1707.

MATT. XI. 11, 12.

Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the baptist : notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven, is greater than he. And from the days of John the baptist, until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

The third SERMON on this text.



HAVING, on the former of these verses, inquired into the character of John the baptist ; and seen that tho he was very great, yet *the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he* ; from the other verse I now proceed to consider,

III. Our Lord's description of the state of things, from the ministry of John, until that time wherein these words were spoken. And here it will be proper,

I. To

1. To explain the terms used to express the condition and state of the church, from the beginning of John's ministry to the time wherein our Saviour utters this expression.

2. To consider the principal things contained herein; the great truths our Saviour would suggest in these terms.

3. To make some reflections hereupon.

1. 'Tis proper to consider the terms. *From the days of John the baptist until now*: that is, from the days of John's ministry; for John was sent to preach the doctrine of the approaching *kingdom of heaven*: from the time that he began to minister, until this time of the ministry of Christ; for our Lord had been some time engaged in that work. John was his fore-runner, who *prepared the way*, and gave the people notice of *the kingdom of heaven*, that it was *very nigh, even at the door*; and afterwards told them who was the Messiah: and then our Saviour's ministry took place; John *decreased*, Christ *increased*; John was cast into prison, Christ continued exercising his ministry. And we read that *Jesus made more disciples than John*: tho he baptized none himself, yet however they were baptized by his disciples. So that our Saviour means by this expression, *From the days of John the baptist until now*; "from the time that John began his ministry till this

p John 4. 1.

" very

"very moment, in which I am speaking
"to you."

We are farther to take notice, that this, *until now*, does not exclude the future time. For *until* is often used after such a manner as not to exclude futurity: *He shall not fail, nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth^v; and hath brought judgment to victory^w*. The word does not signify, he shall fail and be discouraged, when he has brought judgment to victory; but this shall be the certain consequence of his courage and resolution, he shall do this without fail. So here; *From the days of John the baptist, until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence*. This was begun under the ministry of John, and this work proceeds and goes on until now; and no stop shall be put to it, but still this shall be the state and condition of things: *The kingdom of heaven shall suffer violence, and the violent take it by force*. However this might be true in regard of the time in which our Saviour spake; it does not follow but it was true also in some subsequent times, *that the kingdom of heaven should suffer violence*: nay, thro'out all the ages of the world, that this would be the case, till the church was perfect and complete.

And this is very agreeable with what our Saviour says afterwards: *All the prophets and the law prophesied until John^x*; but he inti-

^v Isa. 42. 4.

^w Luke 12. 20.

| ^x Mat. 11. 13.

mates, that John's ministry introduced some change in the state of things : for tho he did not bring a new institution of religion, he came to prepare men for it, by the ordinance of baptism, to receive the kingdom of the Messiah.

The event is expressed in these words : *The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.*

I need not take up time to ain what is here signified by *the kingdom of heaven*, because, in the foregoing words, 'tis used in that which is the common sense of it in the new testament ; namely, the state of things under the dispensation of the gospel. Our Lord expresses himself in the present tense ; *The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence* : that is, this is the state and condition wherein we find things now under the gospel. This is the condition of the church now ; and this is the dispensation we are now under : we are come to this bright and glorious state of things, which is spoken of by the prophets, ever since the world began. Now, says he, that this kingdom is established, this is the condition thereof ; *It suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.*

This may seem a pretty strange expression concerning *the kingdom of heaven*, the state of things under the gospel. And indeed the terms are somewhat peculiar ; and the like are not used upon any other occasion by our Saviour, or by his apostles. There are several

ral interpretations of these words. Some take them in an active sense ; *The kingdom of heaven offers violence*, or makes efforts : the kingdom of heaven exerts itself with great vigor and strength. As much as to say, " Things were obscure before John appeared in the world. Then was the gospel-state expected, but now it begins to appear ; it exerts itself, it buds forth, it begins to shew its strength and vigour : and some advances are made towards the establishment of it. And not only does it exert itself in the general, by shewing itself in the world ; but it may in like manner signify, that it offers a sort of violence : it beats down the opposition which is against it ; it breaks thro' all difficulties and obstacles which are in the way, how much soever men are indisposed, by their prejudices, to receive the gospel of the kingdom of heaven. However men of power exert themselves against it, it breaks down all opposition which stands in its way ; it prevails, it goes on and prospers."

'Tis easy to shew that this sense is not at all inconsistent with the state of things, when our Saviour manifested himself to the world ; as we find the history of them recorded in the gospels. There was great opposition, and by those from whom one would have thought it should be least expected : those who were called *the children of the kingdom* ^y,

and were counted the *peculiar people* of God, and seemed to wait for the consolation of Israel; yet these set themselves in opposition to the Messiah, because he did not appear in such a form, and with such pomp and splendor as they expected. And because his forerunner, John the baptist, awakened them to repentance, and was strict and severe in his discipline; the Scribes and Pharisees, who pretended to have already attained to a sufficiency of righteousness, *rejected the counsel of God against themselves*², and submitted not to his baptism.

Now if the words be taken in this sense, "The kingdom of heaven exerts itself with vigour, or struggles with opposition, and prevails against it;" 'tis a prophecy of our Saviour that the truth should prevail and prosper, as well as a declaration what effect it already had in the world. "The kingdom of heaven is advancing against all the opposition which is made against it. Great signs and wonders do shew forth themselves in me;" as if he should say, "and in my disciples: and my doctrine begins to prevail, and to gain upon the minds of men." And if the words are to be taken in this sense; then those which follow, *The violent take it by force*, seem to be spoken in opposition, as it were. As much as if our Saviour should say; "The kingdom of heaven exerts its force, the state of things

² Luke 7. 30.

“ under the gospel prevails, and this glorious administration shews itself in the world : and as that appears with vigour, so the people who will be interested in this dispensation, will be inspired with vigour and resolution too. The kingdom of God advances, it springs forth, and shews its force in the world ; and those who will obtain this kingdom, must shew a great deal of resolution too.”

But then if it be taken passively, as the generality of interpreters understand it, that the kingdom of heaven is violated, or *suffers violence*, as our translation renders it ; it may be interpreted, either of the persecution and oppression which was exercised against the church of God at its first planting : for the time when our Saviour speaks, was when John was cast into prison. Now, says he, *the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence* ; it is oppressed : here is John, my messenger, sent to *prepare my way before me*, and he is cast into prison. And so some interpret the other words, and *the violent take it by force* ; they lay forcible hands upon him, and endeavour to suppress this kingdom : however, their designs will be ineffectual. The subjects of my kingdom are oppress'd and persecuted ; and my doctrine designed to be suppress'd.

Or else it may be understood to regard the great number of persons who did attend the doctrine of John the baptist and of our Saviour. All Judea and Jerusalem came forth

to the baptism of John : and multitudes followed our Lord Jesus Christ to hear his doctrine. Says he, *The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence*, as it were : men rush into this kingdom, as it seems ; by their eagerness, their earnest desire to hear the doctrine of it. For they were in some measure prepared by the ministry of John, and from the time that he began to preach : when once they received his doctrine, the people seemed very vigorous and eager for the kingdom of Christ ; they waited for it with great impatience, were for hastening it as much as possible : and, when it came, they press'd into it with much earnestness, and in great numbers. And after this manner our translators seem to take the same word, when they so render it in Luke 16. 16. *The law and the prophets were until John ; since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it*^a. Men who are eager to get into some place, and are striving who shall get in first in a croud, offer a sort of violence one to another, that each one may get in before the other. And so the translators seem to have understood the word here ; *The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence* : men are pressing and striving who shall be foremost, who shall get first into this new state of things ; and who shall have the greatest advancement therein. So the children of Zebe-

^a Καὶ πάντες εἰς αὐτὸν βιάζονται.

dee, the disciples of our Lord, seem ambitious that they might sit at our Lord's right and left hand in his kingdom; that they might not only be admitted into his kingdom, but have the greatest honour there. Thus 'tis remarkable, in Luke 16. where our Saviour is speaking to the same purpose as in the words of our text: he says, *Every man presseth into it*; that is, great numbers, almost every body, seem to be ambitious now to have an interest in the kingdom of God: for then the Jews had a great expectation of the glorious kingdom of the Messiah, which was prophesied of.

It may farther be extended to the importunity of that people to erect this kingdom: they would *by force have made Jesus a king*^b. He was obliged to retire from them, that he might escape that honour they would have done him. And, when he entred into Jerusalem, *they spread branches of palm-trees before him, and cried Hosanna to him*; calling him *the king of Israel*^c. They would have introduced this new state of things in such a manner as seemed most agreeable to their carnal dispositions; and *the violent* were ready to *take it by force*, and to erect a kingdom whether our Saviour would or no. If it be interpreted only with respect to the numbers who embrace the doctrine of the gospel; this may be very agreeable to what our Sa-

^b John 6. 15.

^c Chap. 12. 13.

viour here says, *Every one presseth into it.* And indeed the words of our text, by the Æthiopic version, are translated to this purpose : *Many violent persons take it by force.* And *all of them break in upon it*, as the Syriac renders it. Every man breaks in upon it, and endeavours to enter by force.

But some think, that by these words is express'd the character of the persons who, in a special manner, seem desirous and ambitious to obtain the kingdom of heaven ; or to comply with the terms of the gospel. *The violent* : that is, say some, those who are counted violent men, such as extortioners, such as publicans, who oppress and vex others ; such as soldiers, who live upon spoil and rapine : these are a sort of persons who *enter into the kingdom of heaven* ; while those, who might rather have been expected to enter in, such as the Scribes and Pharisees, and doctors of the law, shut themselves out by their obstinacy and unbelief. These poor people, who seem the most unlikely in the world to seek an interest in the kingdom of heaven, obtain it. Agreeably to this, you find the centurion had extraordinary faith, when he came to Christ for the healing of his sick servant ; insomuch that our Lord gives this testimony of him : *Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith ; no, not in Israel*^a. Here a Roman soldier shews more faith than was found among the Is-

^a Mat. 8. 10.

raelites, who profess'd to be the people of God. The violent take the kingdom of heaven; such men of violence as these. But, says Christ, *the children of the kingdom shall be cast into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*^e. "Here is one who" is not one of the children of the kingdom, "is not born or educated a Jew, and yet he" has more faith than the Israelites. He "receives my ministry;" as if Christ should say, "he enters into the kingdom of heaven" sooner than others." *The violent take it by force*; men who are given to rapine and spoil, to devour and oppress others. And so *publicans and harlots*, Christ said, *went into the kingdom of heaven before the Scribes and Pharisees*^f: the publicans, or tax-gatherers, who were extortioners and oppressors. See likewise Luke 3. where you'll find it thus began by the ministry of John the baptist: for, in the 12th verse 'tis said; *Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do?* Ver. 13. *And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.* These violent people came to submit to John's baptism. *And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do?* *And he said unto them, Do violence to no man.* He tells these violent men, they should do violence to no man; neither accuse any man falsely; and be content

^e Mat. 8. 12.

^f Chap. 21. 31.

with their wages ^g. These comply with the doctrine of the kingdom, tho so very unlikely to have submitted to it ; whereas those, from whom more might have been reasonably hoped for, rejected the offers and terms of the gospel.

Agreeably to this, you may read what is said in Luke 7. where our Saviour is speaking of John the baptist after the same manner as in our context : *And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him* ^h. Thus Luke expresses it : and Matthew says, *The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.* The publicans, the violent persons, and the soldiers, such as these, sooner embrace the doctrine of the gospel than the Scribes and Pharisees.

Some interpret this to extend to the calling of the Gentiles. Such were divers of the soldiers, and other persons who embraced the gospel ; as the Syrophenician woman, whose faith our Saviour so much extolled : *O woman, great is thy faith ; be it unto thee even as thou wilt* ⁱ. Thus some oppose these terms unto that pretence which the Jews had of being heirs of the kingdom : and therefore our Lord calls them, *the children*

^g Luke 3. 14.

^h Luke 7. 29, 30.

ⁱ Mat. 15. 28.

of the kingdom. And the apostle Paul says, *What advantage then hath the Jew, and what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way; chiefly because unto them were committed the oracles of God*^k. Our Saviour preached first to the Jews, and ordered his disciples to preach first to them; and therefore, after his ascension, to *begin* their ministry at *Jerusalem*^l. These were called *the children of the kingdom*^m: the *promise* was to them, and to their childrenⁿ, in a special manner; the promise of the holy Spirit: and therefore 'twas poured forth first at Jerusalem. Now, in opposition to these who were considered as heirs, the calling of the Gentiles, some think, is signified here by the *kingdom of heaven suffering violence*: for, in the days of John the baptist, there were some Gentiles, some soldiers; and so in the days of Christ, some who began to *take it by force*, who were resolved to be interested in this happiness and salvation, and to have it whatsoever it cost them; while the children of the kingdom slighted, and were regardless of the great advantages of the gospel. The kingdom of heaven was *snatched* out of their hands, as it were; for so the word^o properly signifies, which is here rendered *take it by force*. As if he had said: "People will wrest from you the kingdom of God; the very hea-

^k Rom. 3. 1, 2.

^l Luke 24. 47.

^m Mat. 8. 12.

ⁿ Acts 2. 39.

^o Ἀφαιρῶ.

“ then and infidels will become true christians, while you despise the gospel of the kingdom : and this begins already to appear, they are more ready to embrace the gospel than the Scribes and Pharisees among you.” As if he should say, “ if you have not a care they will wrest it out of your hands, if you don’t duly consider and improve the design of John’s ministry, and prepare for the gospel I am publishing to you ; if you do not chearfully embrace the proposals of grace in it; and if you will not enter into the marriage-supper, those from the high-ways and hedges will : the violent will snatch the blessing from you by force, and will wrest the privileges and advantages of the gospel out of your hands.”

But then, in the last place, it may signify the temper and disposition of their minds in general, who would, in good earnest, *seek the kingdom of God* : they must be persons of courage and resolution ; they must use vigour, and steddiness of mind. And so it may be taken to represent those qualities which are necessary, if we will be christians in good earnest. *The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence.* Who shall be partakers of this happiness and privilege ? who shall be subjects of this kingdom, and enjoy the privileges and advantages of it ? Not those who indulge themselves in laziness and negligence ; not the indolent and slothful, those who take

no pains, who use no endeavours to obtain so great an advantage. They must be persons of vigour and application, of industry and courage: these are the people who shall be interested in the kingdom of God. And they were those of such a character who began to seize upon it. *From the days of John the baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven is exhibited, it suffereth violence: it is exposed to people as a prize; but they must run, if they would have it; they must fight, or they can't conquer. They must persevere, they must go on: for, if they set their hand to the plough, and then look back, they declare themselves unfit for the kingdom of God* ^P.

And here may seem to be an allusion,

(1.) In the general, to a castle, or to a city which is stormed. *The kingdom of heaven*, John had told the people, *was at the door*; and Christ told them, he was *the Son of God*, and came to preach the doctrine of the kingdom: but they were not to enter in, as they imagined, without any more ado. There needed a preparation; there needed the mortification of sin, by the ministry of John, who preached repentance: and they needed to be prepared for this kingdom by the ministry of our Saviour, who taught them mortification and self-denial; and that they must take up the cross and follow him. There were difficulties in the way, *offences would come*: and many went away from Christ

^P Luke 9. 62.

when

when they heard his doctrine, and found what self-denial it required. Thus the rich man in the gospel had not vigour of mind enough for the kingdom of God. *The kingdom of God suffers violence*: 'tis as a town or city, and it must be besieged; and none shall obtain it but those who are able to overcome difficulties, and endure trials. They must be exposed to dangers, they must surmount many and great obstacles, and use much diligence and application of mind. They must persist, and it must be taken by force; it must be stormed. Our Saviour compares it to a *strait gate*, and *narrow way*; and says, *many should seek to enter, and not be able*^a. 'Tis a moral impotence: they have not the heart to deny themselves, and undergo that discipline our Lord enjoins; they cannot *for sake house, land, wife, and children, for his sake*; they can't *lay down their lives for him*^r. They can make some appearance by their profession, but can bring forth no fruit: for *by and by they are offended*^t, like the *stony ground*, because of persecution.

(2.) Hereby may be farther intimated the great privilege and advantage of the dispensation of the gospel; and that our Saviour hereby signifies it is attainable. There are difficulties indeed in the way; but however a man may be interested in these great privileges notwithstanding. *It suffers violence,*

^a Luke 13. 24.^t Chap. 14. 26.^r Mat. 13. 21.

but *the violent take it by force*. And so it may be spoken by way of opposition to what we find under the dispensation of the law : when all the people were gathered about the mount, in Exod. 19. they were forbid to approach, because 'twas suitable to that dispensation they should be kept at a distance. *Let not the priests and the people break thro' to come up unto the Lord, lest he break forth upon them* *. *Let them not break thro'* : the word the Septuagint uses here †, is the same with that in our text, let them not *offer violence* ; they must keep their distance. Whereas *we are come to mount Sion*, says the apostle in Heb. 12. where he shews the difference between the state of the gospel, which is called *the kingdom of heaven*, and that of the law ; and how much greater privileges we enjoy now than the Jews did then : *For ye are not come to the mount that might be touched, &c. but ye are come to mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels ; to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven ; and to God, the judge of all ; and to the spirits of just men made perfect ; and to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant ; and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel* : better things than the sprinkling of Abel's sacrifice. *The kingdom of hea-*

* Exod. 19. 24.

† Οἱ δὲ ἱερεῖς καὶ ὁ λαὸς μὴ | διατίδωσαν ἀναβῆναι πρὸς τὸν
θεόν. LXXII.

ven now *suffers violence*. You may press in upon it: and there is no such inhibition, there is no such restraint put upon you as was under the dispensation of the law; but you may obtain these great privileges if you have but a heart, but a resolution to obtain them.

Some think there is an allusion here to the entrance of the people of Israel into the land of Canaan. They were exhorted *to be of good courage*^u; and not to regard the message brought by the spies, that the sons of Anak were so great that they appeared but as grasshoppers in comparison of them. Thus as the children of Israel were to enter into Canaan in a military way, by force of arms, and in the exercise of courage and resolution; so our Saviour compares our obtaining the kingdom of heaven with this. Notwithstanding all the terrible things which appear in our way, we ought to be of good courage; for the kingdom of heaven is to be taken, as it were, in a military way: and those who are resolved, may obtain the great advantages which attend it. *The violent take it by force*: we must arm ourselves therefore with courage and resolution.

Thus have I explained to you the terms; *The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force*. I proceed now to consider,

^u Numb. 13. 32. Deut. 31. 6.

2. The main things contained in these words : which are,

(1.) That a man who will devote himself to the service of Christ, had need be possessed of a great deal of courage, resolution, patience, and constancy ; a vigorous frame of mind. If he will make any thing of religion, if he will belong to the kingdom of heaven, and be a disciple of Christ, he must arm himself with these graces and virtues.

(2.) That those who do make their attempts with that vigour and courage, and resolution, which are hereby expressed, shall certainly prevail. *Our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.* It *suffers violence* ; there's the attack : and *the violent take it by force* ; there's the success.

(1.) We are to consider the temper of mind those ought to have who would be christians in good earnest. If they would obtain an interest in *the kingdom of heaven*, they must consider it must be stormed. Our blessed Saviour bids men *sit down and count the cost*, and tells them what religion is worth on the one hand, how excellent a thing it is ; and, on the other hand, he acquaints them what it will cost them, what they must part with, if they obtain it. He tells them great and glorious things of the kingdom of heaven : of *sitting down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob* ^v ; of *being owned by himself at the last day*, and being *brought into the joy of*

Mat. 8. 11.

their

their Lord ^w : but he informs them, on the other hand, that they must *hate house and land, wife, and children, and their own lives too* ^x, in comparison of what he proposes to them. He tells them, 'tis the part of a prudent man to *sit down first, and count the cost* ^y. 'Tis a great delusion for people to imagine, as some do, that 'tis so easy a thing to get to heaven, that they need only profess the true religion, whether they practise it or not. They will be mightily mistaken in the end, if they don't mend this error of their minds. 'Tis represented to us, in the scripture, as a work of great labour and industry : we must *run, if we would obtain* ^z. 'Tis a *race* ; and we must *run with patience* ^a. We must *labour in our Lord's vineyard* ^b, or else we shall not receive the wages : and tho some come later than others, yet all must labour. We must *be stedfast and immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord* ^c. We must exercise the part of military men : we must *put on the whole armour of God* ^d ; and, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, we must *endure hardships* ^e, and inure ourselves to difficulties. We must *overcome principalities and powers ; and spiritual wickednesses in high places*. We must conquer ourselves, and our own passions : we must *overcome the world*.

^w Mat. 25. 34.^x Luke 14. 26.^y Ver. 28.^z 1 Cor. 9. 24.^a Heb. 12. 1.^b Mat. 20. 1.^c 1 Cor. 15. 58.^d Eph. 6. 11.^e 2 Tim. 2. 3.

This

This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith^f. When our Saviour says, *the kingdom of heaven suffers violence*, he shews there is need of exerting great vigour; and that intimates there are difficulties and dangers in the way. Our own imaginations will represent to us great dangers, and so will the enemies of our souls: and our Saviour himself declares they are not inconsiderable difficulties; and therefore we must arm ourselves with confidence, that we shall have the divine assistance. But we must not think that heaven is obtained without care, without thought, without deliberation, without a great deal of industry and application of mind, without a great deal of courage and resolution; for experience, as well as the word of God, testifies the same; the experience of christians in all ages, who have met with great opposition in this spiritual warfare by the reluctancy of human nature, by persecutors amongst men, and by evil spirits; so that they have found there was the greatest occasion imaginable to rally their spirits, to encourage themselves in the Lord their God, to *watch and be sober*^g, to *keep their garments*^h, and to use all the proper means which God has instituted for the purpose; to use the help of others, their counsel and direction, that they might *be able to stand*

^f 1 John 5. 4.

^g 1 Theff. 5. 6.

| ^h Rev. 16. 15:

with their loins girtⁱ, and their lamps burning^k.

I might easily represent to you how necessary it is for persons thus to do, if I should give you a description of the weakness of our own minds, our proneness to temptation, the remainder of corruption in our hearts, the force of evil examples, our own negligence and stupidity sometimes when in danger; the general course of the world; and how easily men are persuaded to things whereby they may indulge their ease and their sloth. And if I should represent, on the other hand, the violent temptations, the persecutions men must undergo when they are called *to resist unto blood*, the violence which must be done to our natural affections, when we must abandon our nearest relations for the sake of Christ; if this should be done, you would easily discern that there needs a great deal of christian bravery and resolution to overcome in this siege. And tho some make their attack in a place of more difficulty than others, if I may so express it; yet all have their difficulties. Indeed there is nothing prescribed to us in religion but what is very reasonable and just, and so *the ways of God* are in themselves *ways of pleasantness, and paths of peace^l*: but yet this is certain, that there are great difficulties and trials to be encountered with in the way; and we

ⁱ 1 Pet. 1. 13.

^k Mat. 25. 1.

^l Prov. 3. 17.

had need therefore have great strength and resolution to overcome them.

But I content myself with giving you a general account of these things, because I would proceed to what I farther proposed: and that is,

(2.) To observe, that here is an assurance of success signified by this expression, *The violent take it by force*. It is attacked, but it is not impregnable. Some of the most unlikely persons in the world, some of the most unworthy, such as the soldiers, such as the publicans, these entered into the kingdom of God; these would not go without it. As Jacob said to the angel, *I will not let thee go, unless thou blest me*^m; so the Syrophenician woman pressed into the kingdom of heaven with such ardour and vehemence, that our Lord cries out, with admiration, *O woman, great is thy faith*ⁿ. No repulse would make her lay aside her hope; but still she goes on with resolution and vigour. And so must we, if we would in good earnest obtain heaven: we must be resolved that we will have it, whatsoever it cost us; that we will be the disciples of Christ, whatsoever we meet with: and, if so, we shall be successful; *the violent take it by force*. God suffers himself to be prevailed upon by such importunate persons. The reason why men do not obtain, is, because they don't seek^o; don't

^m Gen. 32. 26.

ⁿ Mat. 15. 28.

^o Chap. 7. 8.

follow their research after the manner they ought to do. 'Tis true, we are impotent creatures, and unable to perform this of ourselves: and there may be a formidable character made of this matter, like that the spies represented of the land of Canaan; *'tis full of walled cities, and there are giants in it*^p. But when we consider, *greater is he that is for us, than he that is against us*^q; *he is faithful that hath promised*^r; and *God will give his holy Spirit to those who sincerely ask it*^t; when we consider that Christ has conquered our spiritual enemies already, and will *make us more than conquerors*^s; when we consider, that tho we have discouragements in the way, yet we have motives which are greater, we have the hope of eternal life; tho we are weak in ourselves, *we can do all things thro' Christ which strengthneth us*^t; tho naked, and unarmed, and so liable to become an easy prey to our enemies, yet when we have *put on the whole armour of God, we shall be able to stand*^u: *the violent will take it by force*. There will success attend us; there is the divine promise. And experience shews the same; that those who have appeared weak on other occasions, have appeared strong when they have armed themselves after this manner. When we are ready to sink, the divine arm will be a stay to us:

^p Numb. 13. 28.

^q 1 John 4. 4.

^r Heb. 10. 23.

^t Luke 11. 13.

^s Rom. 8. 37.

^t Phil. 4. 13.

^u Eph. 6. 11.

therefore

therefore we have the utmost reason to resolve upon the obtaining this great advantage, an interest in the kingdom of God ; to resolve to be the disciples of Christ, whatsoever we may be called to do or suffer : and how self-denying soever our duties may be, that we will not be discouraged at any difficulties in the way. Success will crown our labours. The way we must go is indeed attended with some difficulties ; but it will terminate in a state of everlasting glory and felicity.

I should now have made some reflections upon what has been said ; but the latter part of this discourse you see being designed to direct our practice, I shall need say the less. However,

1. It shews us they are mightily mistaken who think they are the disciples of Christ because they are born of christian parents, or are instructed in the principles of the christian religion. They pretend they are true christians ; whereas they have made no effort against sin and temptation, never considered the terms which Christ proposes, know nothing what belongs to self-denial, have no disposition to do any thing for the sake of Christ. They may flatter themselves, and others flatter them as they please ; but they will find, if ever they enter into the kingdom of grace here, so as to be intitled to glory, *the kingdom of heaven must suffer violence, and*

and the violent must take it by force : they must have a firm resolution of mind, a great deal of perseverance. And we cannot have that resolution, unless we prefer the kingdom of heaven above all other interests whatsoever. Nor will a few languid endeavours succeed in this matter ; but there is an absolute necessity of exerting our utmost strength and vigour : and we shall soon be convinced of this, if we do but consider that it is a matter of the last importance ; that it is obstructed by many and great oppositions and difficulties ; that the more vigorously we exert our powers in the divine service, the more we glorify the great giver of them ; and that the opportunity for this service is very short and uncertain.

2. It shews, on the other hand, that they are mightily mistaken who are ready almost to think that 'tis a way impracticable ; are ready to form to themselves such difficulties, as if it would be a vain thing to be religious. How many have complained, that they were assaulted with so many temptations, filled with so much corruption, surrounded with so many objects to seduce them, and that they found it so difficult to overcome evil habits ; that they have been ready to think hard of the christian religion, and to call Christ an austere master, and to say his yoke is not easy ? This is for want of understanding the nature of christianity ; for there is nothing unreasonable that Christ has im-

posed. This is for want of relishing the delights and pleasures of religion. 'Tis for want of considering that it becomes rational creatures to make the attempt, if the success were but barely possible; that wonderful things have been done by resolved persons; that others have often succeeded, and come off victorious in the same warfare; that the divine aid is promised; and that notwithstanding the great difficulty there is of breaking off evil habits, yet when they are, by the assistance of God's grace, broken, and contrary habits govern our minds, then it will be more easy to walk in the way of holiness than of sin. They don't consider that 'twill be worth the while to undergo some fatigue at present for a state of everlasting life. If men will forego their present pleasures for some future temporal advantage; is it not worth the while to endure some toil and labour, some application of mind, for the sake of present peace of conscience, and an everlasting peace in the end? In one word, the greater difficulties we cheerfully encounter in our christian course, the more we discover our love to God, and the greater will be our reward; which will undoubtedly be proportioned to the difficulties we surmount in the way.

Let those then, who have engaged themselves under the banner of Christ, and are willing to storm the kingdom of heaven, *be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might;*

might ^v ; improve their advantage, and not be discouraged at what they meet with in the way. *In due time they shall reap, if they faint not* ^w.

And let those who never yet firmly resolved to become his disciples, consider well of the matter, and see whether 'tis not worth the while, since there is a certainty of success. In this *spiritual warfare* we shall certainly be *more than conquerors* ^x. If we attend to our duty, we shall certainly share the spoil, and partake in the triumph at last. Therefore since certain victory attends us, let us all arm ourselves with the same confidence, that we may obtain the same advantage.

^v Eph. 6. 10.
^w Gal. 6. 9.

| ^x Rom. 8. 37.





SERMON XII.

Preach'd at PINNERS-HALL, Feb. 3, 1704.

PROV. xxiii. 23.

The former part of the verse.

Buy the truth, and sell it not.

The first SERMON on this text.



WHILE every man is seeking his gain, and endeavouring to take a true and just prospect of his advantage in his converse and commerce in the world, 'tis great pity that so few are concerned about that which is in itself the most valuable; how they may gain those spiritual blessings which will be of an eternal advantage to them: while there are so many solicitous thoughts in the minds of men about *what they shall eat, and what they shall drink, and what they shall put on*^y, and how they shall have where-with to procure these temporal accommodations; that no more are concerned for their souls, how these shall be fed, refreshed and

^y Mat. 6. 25.

nourished;

nourished ; and how these shall be clothed and adorned : as if their better part were to be most neglected, and were unworthy of their care and thoughts ; as if man was made for nothing else but to provide a sustenance for himself while he is here, and under no necessity to concern himself how he shall subsist and live in another world : tho it is of small consequence how our bodies are accommodated in comparifon of the great importance of the accommodation of our souls ; and tho time is nothing when compared with eternity. While others therefore are *every one seeking his gain*, his temporal gain *from his own quarter* ^a ; while all mankind, as to temporal things, are saying, *Who will shew us any good* ^a ? and inquiring what profit there is in such a course of life, or in such a trade or employment ; it becomes us to attend to the voice of God, who proposes to us the best of bargains, the greatest of advantages. While others are busying themselves with the things of this world, let us hearken to the voice of wisdom itself, which will teach us what is the most valuable thing, and where we shall find our greatest interest and advantage. While others propose to themselves temporal gain, and how their corn, and their wine, and their flocks, and the like, may abound ; let us propose to ourselves how our souls may be

^a Isa. 56. 11:

| ^a Psal. 4. 6.

advantaged, how we may be made happy here to a good degree, and perfectly and eternally happy hereafter. The only way to be thus happy and blessed will be to make a wise improvement of our present time, in driving this bargain which is proposed to us in the words of our text, to *buy the truth, and not to sell it.*

Commerce is one great band of human society. Men find it their common advantage to trade with one another; and this not only links and ties families and cities, but even distant nations together: and how glad are men to entertain a correspondence with those who can supply them with any commodities of advantage? sometimes tho they furnish them only with things which are for ornament, for pomp, or for pride. But how much more is commerce desirable, when those things are brought which are necessary for the support of human life? when corn is brought to a nation which is ready to be famished because of scarcity; or clothing to those who are destitute of raiment? when arms are brought to a people who are naked and defenseless, and under the immediate apprehensions of the hostile approach of a powerful neighbour? Such things as these are in a special manner looked upon as valuable; and every one would be willing to furnish himself with goods of this kind. But all that may recommend temporal things unto men, and may engage them

them to trade, are nothing in comparison to those spiritual blessings which are represented to us in the scriptures under the name of *truth*, and the like. And therefore most welcome should be such an exhortation as this, a proposal so profitable. *It is a true and faithful saying, 'tis worthy of all acceptance*^b; because we shall be miserable without the blessing which is here proposed to us. Here is a bargain therefore of the highest consequence represented to us in the text, and it becomes us accordingly to embrace it.

There is no need that I should insist on the words which precede these, there seeming to be no dependance between them. As 'tis common in this book of Proverbs, which chiefly consists of short maxims and sayings, which, as they are design'd for our use on a variety of occurrences, and should for that end be treasured up in our memories, and frequently thought on; so they do not strictly depend upon one another. This then must be looked upon as such a proverbial speech; a thing to be frequently remembred, and to be constantly put in practice by us: this is to be a rule to us, a maxim from which we are not to deviate upon any occasion. Remember, we are to *buy the truth, and not to sell it.*

In discoursing on this text, I shall endeavour,

^b 1 Tim. i. 15.

- I. To explain the terms which are used in it.
- II. To persuade you to embrace the good bargain which is here proposed.

I. I shall endeavour to explain the terms: by shewing what is meant by *truth*; what we are to understand by *buying the truth*, to which we are exhorted; and what by *selling the truth*, which is prohibited to us.

1. We are to inquire what is meant by *truth*.

You know that *truth* has various acceptations in the holy scripture; and when it regards mankind, as you see it does here, I think they may be reduced to two.

Either hereby is signified the true doctrine, true notions of things, which is objective truth; or else hereby is signified, subjectively, that truth which is in any man, in his mind, in his heart, which inheres in him, and is therefore a virtue or a grace. The former signifies truth, as it is the object of our understanding; the latter signifies honesty and sincerity, which is a grace or virtue of the heart.

You will find it is in many places taken in both these senses. In John 3. 21. it is taken for fidelity, or honesty and sincerity, integrity of heart; *But he that doth the truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God. He that doth the truth*; that is, who acts truly, uprightly,

uprightly, honestly and sincerely, he is willing his works should be exposed to the light, And so the apostle Paul, Phil. i. 18. speaks of truth in the same sense: *What then? notwithstanding every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached. Whether in pretence; that is, only in pretence, or sincerely and uprightly, with a good and honest design.*

As to the other sense, namely, true doctrine, true notions of things; that this is signified by truth, you find frequently in the scripture. And because God is the fountain and original of truth, therefore he is called truth. And our Lord Jesus is said to be truth itself; *I am the way, the truth, and the life^c.* The word of God is the great instrument for the revealing of the greatest and most important truths; therefore 'tis called *the word of truth*; and sometimes 'tis said to be *the truth*. *Thy loving kindness have I set before mine eyes, and I have walked in thy truth^d*; that is what elsewhere is called a *walking in the law of the Lord^e*, according to the rule of his sacred word. So our Lord Jesus Christ prays for his disciples; *Sanctify them thro' thy truth, thy word is truth^f.* And you will find, under this character, the word of God is spoken of in the 119th Psalm, in several places. *I have chosen the way of truth; thy judgments have I*

^c John 14. 3.

^d Psal. 26. 3.

^e Neh. 10. 29.

^f John 17. 17.

laid before me ^g. Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness; and thy law is the truth ^h. Thou art near, O Lord; and all thy commandments are truth ⁱ. And as the law of God, or the word of God in general, is called *the truth*, because those true notions and doctrines, and precepts are contained in it, which are to inform our minds, and to direct our lives; so the gospel is eminently called *the truth*. I say, the gospel is eminently called *the truth*, because there is so much of divine truth and knowledge contained therein, and explained thereby. So Ephes. 4. 21. the gospel is called *the truth as it is in Jesus*. And John 1. 17. *The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ*. The gospel is called *grace*, because of the manifestation of God's free will, his gracious purpose of saving sinners, tho infinitely unworthy of his mercy: and 'tis called *truth*, because of the eminent discovery of the divine perfections, and other great and important truths which are of the highest consequence to men. 'Tis called *truth* likewise in opposition to the law: not that the law was false, but that part of the law which was ceremonial was a shadow. A shadow is not the substance; a picture is not the true face: and accordingly the law being but *a shadow of good things to come* ^k, and the gospel representing Christ as come,

^g Psal. 119. 30.

^h Ver. 142.

ⁱ Ver. 151.

^k Col. 2. 17:

repre-

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representing the body and substance; this dispensation is much more glorious than the other, and therefore is called *the truth*. Their tabernacle was a typical tabernacle; but 'tis *the true tabernacle which God has pitched, and not man*¹. Their sacrifices were typical sacrifices: but our Lord is the true sacrifice; a sacrifice which is effectual, and has virtue to the purpose of making atonement for sin, of reconciling God to sinners, and engaging him to pass by their offences, and receive them again into his favour.

Now when Christ is called *truth*, regard is had unto him, as he is the fountain of truth and life: when the word of God is called *truth*, regard is had to the word as the great instrument of communicating it: there is a respect to the law in a degree, and to the gospel in a greater, as containing a more ample discovery of those things which are most eminent in their importance. Thus our Lord Jesus says, *God will have such to worship him that shall worship him in spirit and in truth*^m. In *truth*: one interpretation whereof may be, worship him according to the true light of the gospel, and not according to the shadows and ceremonies of the law. So when we obey the gospel, we are said to *obey the truth*. To this purpose the apostle Peter says, that we *have purified our souls in obeying the truth*ⁿ. And

¹ Heb. 8. 2.

^m John 4. 24.

ⁿ 1 Pet. 1. 22.

in the same sense the apostle Paul blames the Galatians : *O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that you should not obey the truth ° ?*

If you ask in what sense we are to take this in our text : tho 'tis certainly true that sincerity, and honesty and integrity, is worth purchasing, for 'tis an eminent virtue and grace ; yet the text seems to have a more comprehensive sense, and to regard truth as it is objectively proposed to us ; that we should have a value for all true principles and notions, or doctrines which are contained in the word of God, which is the word of truth ; that we should so esteem these as to *buy them, and not to sell them*. As this is a very comprehensive sense, so it is plain and obvious. And tho when the wise man wrote, the mind of God was not so clearly explained as under the new-testament-dispensation ; yet if there was reason for him to speak after this manner in a time of less light, there is a greater force added to the exhortation under the more glorious administration of the gospel. For 'tis a standing and undoubted maxim in all ages, that we should *buy the truth, and sell it not*.

As *truth* comprehends the whole which is contained in the divine word, the whole of divine revelation ; so you see it signifies as much as the true religion. And if the question be about any particular doctrine or pre-

cept which belongs to the true religion; this maxim is still of force, that that particular precept, that particular doctrine is to be *bought*, and *not to be sold*. 'Tis true therefore of the whole body of religion, whether under one dispensation or another, provided it be the true religion. 'Tis true of the whole, and true of every part: every part of *truth* is to be *bought*, and *not to be sold*.

It is in this comprehensive sense therefore that I take the words to be intended by the wise man: and this seems to be confirmed by those which follow in the same verse. *Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding.* *Also* is a supplement of the translators, which had better have been left out. *Buy the truth, and sell it not.* Would you know what is meant by the truth? *Wisdom, instruction, and understanding.* What is that *wisdom, instruction, and understanding*, which are so often recommended in the book of the Proverbs, but true religion? Several names are given to it, *wisdom, instruction, and understanding*; but either signifying the same thing, or else the several parts thereof. By one of these terms may be signified that which we call *knowledge*; a right perception or notion of things: by another may be intended the improvement of the capacity of the mind; a man is said to have *wisdom* who has a capacity of perceiving and penetrating, and, when light is afforded to him,

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is capable of making an improvement thereby : and by the other of these terms may be signified prudence, or that virtue whereby a man governs and conducts himself according to those good rules which are prescribed to him, and those good notions he has imbibed in his mind. Now *truth* may be affirmed to be all of these ; or either of these may be called *truth*. That man acts according to truth, who, when he has perceived right notions, has a capacity of receiving them ; and when he has received them, acts prudently according to them. And therefore you are to understand by *truth* not only the information of the mind, but that which is the consequence of divine truth, when it takes place in the soul as it ought to do ; the regulation of the heart, of the passions and affections, and the good government of a man's life. For true religion is not an empty notion : the design of it is not only to inform mens minds, and to give them just notions of things ; but to reform their hearts, to subdue their disorderly passions, to bring them to good reason, and to engage them to submit to the conduct of our Lord Jesus Christ. And he makes known truth to this purpose, and is himself called *truth* : and is called *wisdom* in the 8th chapter of this book, to shew that he is the author and original of all true wisdom ; and, in a special manner, of that divine knowledge which is of the highest consequence to the souls of men.

So

So that, in short, the *truth*, which is here in this figurative manner exposed to sale, is the true religion, as it is calculated and adjusted to the information of our minds, and to the reformation of our hearts and lives, whether it be in one dispensation or in another: but by how much the more clearly truth is proposed to us, so much the stronger is the obligation upon us *to buy it*, and *not to sell it*.

2. What is it to *buy the truth*? To *buy* does not signify, in this proverbial speech, that we have any thing which can be a consideration equally valuable to the truth which is proposed unto us, and as it were exposed to sale. All that we have is nothing comparatively to *the truth*. One may say, as the wise man says of love, *If a man would give all the substance of his house to purchase it, it would utterly be contemned*^p. If a just price were to be insisted on, we have nothing to offer. Nor is it hereby understood, that what we have to offer, can be of any advantage to him who proposes truth to us. God is the author of truth. When men expose a thing to sale, if any are desirous to buy it, they expect some advantage for what they sell; but this is a sort of *buying without money and without price*, as the prophet Isaiah speaks: *Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea come, buy wine and milk*

^p Cant. 8. 7.

without money and without price^q. Nor is it hereby understood that we can do any thing in a way of merit in the least, which may procure to us this good, this advantage of truth. As we have nothing which can rise up to its value, so we have nothing meritorious in the least degree. As *our goodness does not extend to God*^r, we can give him no advantage. *Can a man be profitable to God*^t? *If thou art righteous, what givest thou him, or what receiveth he of thine hand*^s? So neither can we profit ourselves by way of merit; we can't procure this advantage to ourselves by any thing that we can do. What have we to offer, upon which to plead any thing of merit? *We must say*, even when we do the best, *we are unprofitable servants*^t. And what are we then when we do the worst? We do no more, nor so much as we should do, when we do the best. We do less than our duty on many occasions; and often we transgress against the divine laws: therefore there is nothing intimated by this term of *buying*, that we have any merit to plead with God.

But hereby is signified, that as men will be at great charge and expence to procure to themselves things which are of great importance and advantage; so we must earnestly desire truth: we must, with the warmest incli-

^q Isa. 55. 1.

^r Psal. 16. 2.

^s Job 22. 2.

^t Chap. 33. 7.

^t Luke 17. 10.

nations,

nations, aspire after true, that is, divine knowledge and understanding. We must seek it industriously ; we must be at some cost and pains ; we must think nothing too dear to part with upon that account. This is plainly the meaning of *buying the truth* : we must be willing to part with that which may seem valuable to us, or valuable to others, who don't know how to make a just estimate of the truth ; whatsoever it be, or whatsoever price men may put upon it, we must think it as dung and dross, and not worthy to be compared with the knowledge of God. And these terms are used elsewhere in the scripture ; as in that of Isaiah 55. mentioned before. So in the Revelation, God counsels the church of the Laodiceans, by the apostle John, *to buy of him* those great advantages there mentioned : *I counsel thee*, says he, *to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich ; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear ; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see* ^u.

If you ask me what it is to sell, because we are forbidden to *sell the truth*, as well as commanded to buy it : whereas buying signifies, that by all means in the world we are to seek to obtain it, and to spare no pains to furnish ourselves with it ; so the prohibition, to *sell the truth*, signifies that we are not to

^u Rev. 3. 18.

part with the truth in general, the true religion, or any one point of it ; we are not to part with any one precept of the law of God, any one article of the true religion. We are to have a just value for truth, to do all we can to acquire it ; and when it is acquired, we are by no means in the world to part with it. Whatsoever pretences are used, whatsoever overtures are made by those who would get it out of our hands, we should esteem it as a treasure which can never be valued enough, and therefore never to be parted with. Naboth would, upon no terms, part with his vineyard, but would rather lose his life than his inheritance, which he had derived from his ancestors^w : and if we have derived truth from a divine original, from our Lord Jesus Christ, it should, on this account, be esteemed sacred by us ; and we should by no means part with it. The wise man therefore, in many places, exhorts that it be kept with the greatest diligence : we are not to think any one can lay down a price sufficient, or propose any other thing as an equivalent for it. We are not to be cheated of this treasure ; *Let no man take thy crown*^x. We are to keep our ornaments, our crown, our treasure, and by no means in the world to be cheated of them by the cunning deceit of men ; by no means to accept of any

^w 1 Kings 21.| ^x Rev. 3. 11.

worldly propoſal, if it be to part with the truth.

To ſhew you that this is clearly the ſenſe of the wiſe man, and to prepare my way to the other part of the diſcourſe ; it will be proper for me to obſerve, that there are ſeveral paſſages in this book wherein he exhorts to the ſame thing in ſubſtance, commends truth as a vaſt treaſure, and never to be parted with. Thus in the firſt chapter he ſays : *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge ; but fools deſpiſe wiſdom and inſtruction. My ſon, hear the inſtruction of thy father, and forſake not the law of thy mother : for they ſhall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck. My ſon, if ſinners entice thee, conſent thou not ^y. And again : My ſon, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee ; ſo that thou incline thine ear unto wiſdom, and apply thine heart to underſtanding : yea, if thou criſt after knowledge, and liſteſt up thy voice for underſtanding : if thou ſeekeſt her as ſilver, and ſearcheſt for her as for hid treaſures : then ſhalt thou underſtand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God ^z, &c.* As it is the duty of the miniſters of God's word to recommend the truth to the ſons of men with the moſt lively warmth and earneſtneſs ; and indeed beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of thoſe

^y Prov. 1. 7—10.

^z Chap. 2. 1—5.

who thus bring the tidings of salvation^a: so we should likewise cry with an earnest desire after it, and seek it with as much importunity as the ministers of the gospel propose it to us, as worthy of our acceptation. Again, Solomon says; *Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding: for the merchandize of it is better than the merchandize of silver; and the gain thereof than fine gold.* Here is the best, the most advantageous commerce in the world. Men know the value of gold and silver, and therefore they will be easily induced to make a bargain when these are proposed upon any reasonable terms: they know the constant stated value of these metals. How desirable then should wisdom be, when 'tis more valuable, more durable, and of a more steady account than these? *She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire, are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her^b.* And farther: *My son, keep sound wisdom and discretion: let not them depart from thine eyes. So shall they be life unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck. Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall*

^a Isa. 52. 7.

1 ^b Prov. 3. 13—18.

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not stumble. When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet^c. Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not, neither decline from the words of my mouth. Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee. Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting, get understanding. Exalt her, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her. She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee. Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings; and the years of thy life shall be many^d. When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitned; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble. Take fast hold of instruction, let her not go; keep her, for she is thy life^e. And again: Doth not wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice? She standeth in the top of high places, by the way in the places of the paths. She crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors. Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of men. O ye simple, understand wisdom^f, &c. And then afterwards: Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold. For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired, are not to be compared to

^c Prov. 3. 21—24.

^d Chap. 4. 5—10.

^e Ver. 12, 13.

^f Chap. 8. 1—5.

it ^s. *I love them that love me ; and those that seek me early shall find me. Riches and honour are with me ; yea, durable riches and righteousness. My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold ; and my revenue than choice silver. I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment : that I may cause those that love me to inherit substance ; and I will fill their treasures* ^h.

Here is an ample account how great an advantage it is to *buy wisdom, to buy the truth* ; and of how great importance it is to keep it, *not to sell it*, not to part with it, *Keep it, for 'tis thy life* ⁱ : search after it, and seek it with the greatest diligence, and at the greatest expence ; and upon no terms, upon no proposal, for no temporal advantage whatsoever, be persuaded to part with it.

Having thus explained the import of the terms used in these words ; I shall apply myself,

II. To persuade you to accept of this offer : to make this a rule and maxim to yourselves while you converse in the world ; upon all occasions *to seek after truth* with this earnestness and diligence ; to endeavour to acquire it, whatever the cost and pains be ; and never to part with it upon any proposal which can be made to you,

^s Prov. 8. 10, 11.

^h Ver. 17. — 21.

ⁱ Prov. 4. 13.

And this I shall do by shewing you the great advantage of *buying*, and the great disadvantage of *selling the truth*.

'Tis a right maxim, that a man ought to be governed by that which is his true interest and advantage. But how many are there who mistake their own interest, and drive therefore the worst bargains in the world? But every thing which religion proposes, is not only for our real but our greatest advantage, if men could be persuaded to believe it. I shall shew you then, how great an advantage it will be to us to *buy the truth*. Which will appear if we consider,

1. That it is in itself infinitely valuable.

2. That as it is thus valuable in itself, so it is of the greatest use and advantage to us.

3. That whatsoever price be demanded of us, or whatsoever expence we are at in acquiring of it, 'tis infinitely below the true worth and value of it.

All these things corresponding together, must needs make it a demonstration that it is a good bargain. If the thing proposed to us is very valuable in itself, if it be of the highest use and advantage to us, and we have the greatest occasion for it in the world; and if we can't possibly out-bid ourselves, and whatsoever is demanded of us, or whatsoever we can offer for it, is infinitely below the true worth of it, and the advan-

tages we shall receive thereby ; every one sees it must be worth the while *to buy the truth, and not to part with it.*

I. 'Tis infinitely valuable in itself. In Prov. 8. *Wisdom*, which may signify the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, but withal signifies a divine perfection, speaks of *being with God from eternity, and before he laid the foundations of the earth ; speaks of being with him, and conducting the world by him.* Wisdom, knowledge, and truth, are divine perfections. God himself is happy in the enjoyment and the perception of truth : he sees all truth in himself ; for he is *the God of truth* : he is truth, wisdom, and knowledge itself ; and all communications of truth are from him. *If any man want wisdom, let him ask it of God*^k : 'tis he who giveth wisdom, knowledge, and understanding : 'tis he who gives it to angels and men, who are the only rational creatures which we find he has made. Now this must needs be a valuable thing in itself : all knowledge, all true knowledge is very valuable. *Every good and perfect gift comes from God*^l : it is a noble capacity which God has given man, that he is a rational creature, and capable of being informed and instructed of many great truths. But what are the truths of philosophy, what is the knowledge of arts and sciences, in comparison of the great and important truths of

^k James 1, 5.

^l 1 Ver. 17.

religion? As for the knowledge of philosophy, the knowledge of languages, the knowledge of arts and sciences; what will these avail a man in regard of his interest in the world to come, if he be ignorant of *the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent? whom to know is life eternal*^m. Tho knowledge be desirable in itself, yet the truth which those persons obtain and acquire who are only conversant about the motions of the stars, or the parts of human bodies, or are measuring the world, and inquiring into the nature and constitution of the several creatures therein; tho this kind of truth be valuable and useful, yet 'tis not by any means to be compared with that greater and more important knowledge, the knowledge which religion affords, how we may have our sins pardoned, and be reconciled to God; how we may be conformed to his image, be happy in him, and be made partakers of his glory. This is the knowledge, this the truth which is proposed to us in the words of our text. 'Tis valuable in itself; for 'tis great and noble, and excellent: and therefore God himself recommends it to us. Our Lord and Saviour who communicates it, calls himself *the way, the truth, and the life*ⁿ. The angels themselves desire to look into these truths, tho they are not so immediately concerned in them as we. The truths are valuable in

^m John 17. 3.

ⁿ Chap. 14. 6.

themselves, and highly valuable, because the divine attributes and perfections are so much manifested and displayed to men thereby. Therefore 'tis worthy the curiosity of angels to inquire into these important matters, the way of man's salvation, and how men should be changed and renewed in the spirit of their mind; the way how sinners should be turned to God, and how they may be regulated and conformed to his will. But then,

2. If truth be so valuable in itself, and therefore ought to be so to us; how much more so in regard of the advantage and use of it to us, the profit which redounds to us hereby? We commonly take an estimate of the value of a thing from the advantage we receive from it. If a man purchase an estate, or a jewel, or any thing else; 'tis because it is valuable in itself, or because he expects to receive some advantage by it. Sometimes a thing may be valuable in itself, and yet not so valuable to us, because we may have no occasion for it; no occasion for a jewel, which may be valuable to a prince. But as truth is valuable in itself, so 'tis of the highest advantage to all those who embrace it. ~~A~~ great many of the treasures of this world are of little or no advantage to those who possess them. Thus they who have abundance of silver and gold, and precious stones, can really enjoy but a small part thereof: but 'tis not so with truth. Every
 4 part

part of it is useful to us, and may afford us some pleasure and satisfaction. Religion, whether we consider it with regard to its doctrines or precepts, is every way of great advantage to us: and this will more fully appear, if we consider, that whatever we can find useful and serviceable in the things of this world to a man in human life, that we shall more abundantly find in those divine truths, which are contained in the word of God, as conducive to our spiritual and eternal life.

As in scripture the word of God is compared to the finest metals, to those which are most valued by men; so the wise man represents divine truths as *an ornament* to us, as *a crown*; and compares them to *precious stones*. And indeed every truth adorns the mind; for the more we know of God, the more are we like him, provided that our hearts and affections are correspondent to our intellectual powers: and we are speaking of truth under that notion, as it adorns a man's soul; not only that he knows more thereof than others do, but that his mind is rectified thereby, his soul delivered from the power of impetuous passions, and corrupt and vile affections. For 'tis after this manner we must acquire truth and wisdom; according to the wise man 'tis in this sense, that he recommends it as the brightest and most valuable ornament: it is *a grace to our necks*, and *a crown to our heads*. 'Tis that
which

which renders a man esteemed in the sight of his fellow-creatures ; and that which is well-pleasing even in the view of his Creator. God loves to see men bear his own image : error is contrary to God, as darkness is contrary to light ; for he is *a God of truth, and without iniquity* °. And iniquity is often opposed to truth in the holy scripture. Thus the apostle Paul, describing the ungodly, says ; *They obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness* p. It is an obedience to the truth, in opposition to an unrighteous rebellion against God, which is required of us. And if we *buy the truth* in this sense, there is nothing can so adorn us ; it will represent us as glorious and lovely in the view of all discerning minds : and sometimes the wicked themselves will be obliged to confess our comeliness. If they see our charity, our patience, and humility, and meekness ; this light will so *shine amongst them*, as to induce them to *glorify our heavenly Father* q. If the light of our minds shines in our conversations, and we live conformable to the just notions contain'd in the word of God ; if *the truth makes us free*, as our Saviour says, and we are delivered from the captivity of sin, *then shall we be free indeed* r. At what a vast expence are some persons for their ornaments ? But how is truth under-valued, because 'tis not esteemed so ornamental as

° Deut. 32. 4.

p Rom. 2. 8.

q Mat. 5. 16.

r John 8. 32, 36.

truly it is? And how great and just a reproach is it to many, that they spare no cost in decking their bodies, while they leave their souls unadorned? The soul, in the naked circumstances it is in by nature, is the object of horror, as it is infected with sin: and yet the souls of men are so neglected, and treated after a manner so careless, as if they were indifferent whether they had souls or no; or as if they were ignorant whether there was any such thing to be expected as the salvation of the soul, or the condemnation of it:

Men highly value those things which may be a defense to them; for what would it signify to a man to enjoy all other advantages of life, if he lies open and exposed to every insulting enemy? But *truth*, 'tis said, *shall keep us*^f; it shall preserve us: it is a defense unto us, as well as an ornament; it will secure us on every side. The divine protection will be ours; God's angels will have charge concerning us, *to keep us in all our ways*^g, when *in all our ways we acknowledge him*^h. As we shall be secured from temporal evils, for all *the ways of wisdom and truth are ways of pleasantness, and paths of peace*^u; so in a special manner from those spiritual enemies who are most destructive: How great an advantage is it for a man to have truth on his side? This is that which has

^f Prov. 6. 22.

^g Psal. 91. 11.

^h Prov. 3. 6.

^u Ycr. 17.

furnished many a one, who has had but a small capacity of knowledge in comparison, *to confound the wisdom of the wise*^v; enabled him *to put to silence the ignorance of men*^w, however sophistically they have managed their arguments. How many, otherwise of a small capacity, yet in the cause of truth, have been able *to render a reason of the hope that is in them with meekness and fear*^x? and being well-furnished with truth in their own souls, they have been capable of *making their light shine*^y to the conviction of others.

It is a guard against the subtle insinuations of Satan. One who is well-instructed in the divine word, and *has respect to all God's commandments*, can answer Satan as our Saviour did; and confound the adversary of his soul, by urging the laws of God against all temptations to sin, and the doctrine of the gospel against all his insinuations and attempts to delude him, and to lead him into error. Truth is of great advantage as 'tis our defense; then may we *lie down in peace, and our rest shall be sweet to us*^z. When we can *exercise ourselves in this, to have always a conscience void of offence towards God and towards men*^a; then shall we not be ashamed; when we *have respect to all his commands*^b; then shall the posture of our minds be fix'd,

^v 1 Cor. 1. 27.

^w 1 Pet. 2. 15.

^x Chap. 3. 15.

^y Mat. 5. 16.

^z Prov. 3. 24.

^a Acts 24. 16.

^b Psal. 119. 6.

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that we shall not be tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive^c. Then shall we be ready, as not being ignorant of Satan's devices, to give a foil to that great adversary of our souls, when he presumes to attack us.

Another great advantage of the truth is this, that it is the very food and nourishment of our souls. Our souls have need of food as well as our bodies; for there is a spiritual life to be maintained as well as a temporal one: *Keep her, for she is thy life*, says the wise man, speaking of wisdom and instruction^d; which is the same as truth. Of how great advantage then must it needs be for us to *buy the truth*? Come, *buy wine and milk, without money and without price*, says the prophet^e. Buy the great conveniences and advantages of life. Every one is willing to buy those which concern the temporal life: and then certainly truth is to be bought at any rate whatsoever, seeing the life of our souls, which is of so much more importance, is concerned therein. *For the soul to be without knowledge is not good^f*: that is, to be without truth. Ignorance of the great and essential truths of religion famishes the soul, and keeps it in a miserable condition. To be *disobedient to the truth*, is to be in a state of alienation from God;

^c Eph. 4. 14.

^d Prov. 4. 13.

^e Isa. 55. 1.

^f Prov. 19. 2.

and

and our souls must famish if they are not spiritually united to God, the fountain of life, who is himself truth and righteousness. It is of the highest importance to us therefore, on that account, that our souls may feed on truth, and be nourished thereby, and grow up, even to eternal life. Our Lord Jesus Christ is to be fed on by faith; and faith is that grace whereby we apprehend and embrace the truths of the gospel, the truths which concern our blessed Redeemer. It is therefore, I say, of the highest advantage, because 'tis our very life, and the food of our souls: and therefore one would think there should need no great persuasion to engage us to buy, if we have a value for our souls, and a value for that which may feed them, and nourish them up to eternal life. It is indeed every thing that is desirable; and so 'tis represented to us in the holy scriptures. 'Tis counted the greatest treasure in the world, the greatest portion, the best inheritance that we can possibly obtain. *I counsel thee, says our Lord, to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.* It is of the greatest benefit to us, on many accounts. All the comforts of life, all the accommodations and conveniences which men enjoy here;

z Rev. 3. 18.

all

all are represented by this one great advantage. It is our food to nourish us ; it is a medicine to heal us of our spiritual distempers ; it is clothing to attire and adorn us ; it is a treasure and inheritance to make us rich. All these resemblances are to signify, that as these things are most earnestly desired by men, and they are very diligent to acquire them ; so truth is more desirable and valuable than them all ; the knowledge of the true God, or the true religion, more to be esteem'd, and therefore is more especially to be pursued. It is our very great advantage, in that it not only affords us a solid peace and contentment of mind, but the greatest satisfaction, the greatest solace and comfort imaginable ; it is *sweeter to our taste than honey, or the honey-comb*^h. As when the disciples of our Lord Jesus came first to him, and were convinced ; with what satisfaction did they receive the doctrine, that *this was the Christ*, when there were sufficient arguments set before them to prove it ? So when Simeon was convinced that the Messiahⁱ was come, and his aged eyes beheld him, there was nothing in this world could be any longer valuable to him ; and therefore he desires to go into another : *Now Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace ; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation*ⁱ. The knowledge of God by Jesus Christ gives

^h Psal. 19. 10.| ⁱ Luke 2. 29.

the highest satisfaction imaginable. And I may say this concerning every particular truth of christianity, that there is a wonderful satisfaction attends it. Error does strangely disturb the soul; vain imaginations arise from thence, and prejudices: and this is the property of error, that as it fills the mind with things which are contrary to truth; so oftentimes the notions of a man are contradictory to one another while he is in error. It is the property of truth to clear the mind, to make darkness fly away, to silence our prejudices, and fill the mind with calmness and serenity. A wise man, a philosopher, is uneasy unless he can find the truth, unless he can find some arguments to demonstrate the truth of such or such a proposition, that so he may receive it and believe it; tho it does not concern the interest of his soul as to his everlasting state. But there is such a thing in man as conscience: and it is the property of religious truth to bring a calm of conscience with it. But if a man does not embrace the truth, there is room for his conscience to upbraid him, that he has not made use of those means and advantages which the providence of God had furnish'd him with, to inform and settle his mind in such a respect. When a man can't say, that his practice is founded upon the divine precepts, he has a conscience to reproach him. When his practice is contrary to the word of God, when he omits
that

that which God requires him to do, or offers that to God in his worship and in his service, which is only an human invention, substituted in the room of a divine command; this must cause an uneasiness in his mind, where there is a tenderness of conscience: and if we have not tenderness of conscience, we are certainly in a dangerous condition.

Who would not therefore *buy the truth*, when there are so many great advantages on its side even in this world? But what is time in comparison of eternity? what is our present satisfaction in comparison of the enjoyment of God in the world to come? What words are sufficient to express the advantage of *buying the truth* in that respect? What an advantage will it be to have this character upon us at the day of our Lord's appearance, that we have not *denied the faith*, that *we have had respect to all his righteous commands*? *They that break the least of God's commandments, and teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but they that do and teach them, shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven*^k. What a great happiness, to have that approbation of our Lord Jesus, *Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of thy Lord*^l? What a happiness, to seek after truth, and adhere to it; the consequence of which is calmness of conscience in this world,

^k Mat. 5. 19.

^l 1 Chap. 25. 23.

and, when we come to die, the comfortable reflection, that we *have walked before the Lord with a perfect heart*? And what a surprizing joy in the world to come, to be let into the knowledge of abundance more truths than we could understand here? What a great reward, to have our capacities enlarged, and the bright emanations of divine truth continually flowing in upon our minds? and to have a fulness of joy, as well as a perfection of knowledge; a capacity of enjoying God, as well as a capacity of knowing him? All the great things which are said of heaven, shew us what an advantage it is to *buy the truth*. What are all the treasures of this world in comparison of the great blessings of the world to come? the great advantage of knowing God, and enjoying him for ever; of living in a state where there shall be *no death, no pain, no sorrow, but all tears shall be wiped from the eyes*^m, and clouds and darkness scatter'd from the mind? where there shall not be the least stain of sin; nor the least desire of change, because the state is happy and perfect, and agreeable to the most earnest longings of our souls, which have a natural and necessary desire to be happy? All this is on the side of truth; these are the advantages which they obtain who buy it. But let us consider;

^m Rev. 21. 4.

3. What it is that is to be paid down for it, what it is we are to part with for truth ; and we shall see that 'tis infinitely below the true worth and value of it. I have shewn that truth is so valuable in itself, that nothing is fit to purchase it ; that it is so advantageous to us, that it ought to be valued above all things whatsoever : and now I shall shew briefly, that what we are required to part with, is infinitely inferior to it. It may be well compared to that *pearl of great price, to buy which, a man sells all that he has*ⁿ. It is impossible we can buy it too dear, because it is infinitely useful to us. Sometimes we may be called to part with all ; not only with our estates, our houses and lands, but with our wives, children, and our lives themselves : and indeed we must be ready to part with every thing, if we will follow Christ as becomes us ; we must sacrifice all to him. This is the most that we can do ; and even this we ought to do chearfully : we should not be much concern'd if we are obliged to part with all the advantages of life, in defense of the truth. This is to do as our Lord Jesus Christ did : *He came into the world to bear witness to the truth*^o. So did the martyrs : *They loved not their lives to the death*, on such occasions as these were. And indeed when these things are rightly considered, this will be no great loss ; to part with our

ⁿ Mat. 13. 46.

^o John 18. 37.

lives, which we must otherwise lay down in a very little time ; to part with our temporal friends and relations, when in a little time we must necessarily be removed to a state where *we shall know no man after the flesh*^a ; where this bond of temporal relation will be intirely dissolved. What do these things therefore signify, which are of so little consequence in themselves ? But perhaps the truth may be bought at a much cheaper rate : indeed we must have a disposition of mind, a resolution to lay down our lives for the truth, if God calls us to it ; but every one is not called actually to suffer martyrdom. A multitude of christians have been called to this honour, and have gone thro' it ; and *great will be their reward in heaven*^r. But how many in such a nation, in such an age as this, may *buy the truth* at a cheaper rate ? may have in this world great advantages, besides the *laying up a good foundation against the time to come* ? But putting the case to the worst, that we are to part with all ; how small a matter is this ? To part with our errors, our prejudices, our vain imaginations, for the sake of truth, I hope no body will think this a hard bargain ; to part with our sins which flow from our ignorance, and are the greatest enemies to our welfare ; to part with our vanity and folly, which are our reproach : sure 'tis an advantage to part with these. So that some

^a 2 Cor. 5. 16.| ^r Mat. 5. 12.

things which we are to part with for the sake of truth, are not worth the keeping; but we ought to part with them by all means in the world. And every thing else, put things to the worst, that we may be called to part with for the sake of truth, are but of a temporal consideration, or very little in comparison of the joy and peace of a good conscience here, and the happiness of heaven hereafter.

Now I think the matter is already sufficiently proved, that 'tis every one's interest to *buy the truth*. I have proved that 'tis infinitely valuable in itself; that it is so in the account of God, in the esteem of angels, and of all wise and good men. I have shewn 'tis most advantageous to us, and we must perish by our folly if we will not purchase it. I have shewn that what we are to pay down is either worth nothing, worse than nothing; or else it is of small consequence in regard of the great thing we are to purchase. This being proved, let me make a reflection or two; leaving the prohibition, *sell it not*, to another time. And,

1. How acceptable then should such an offer and proposal be to every one of us, if the bargain be so good? Does not every one desire his gain and profit? Does not every one desire a convenient opportunity for making his advantage, and raising his fortune? Is not every one, who uses com-

merce, endeavouring to hearken after the times and seasons which are proper for the buying or selling of this and that thing, that he may get gain? Are not men projecting night and day, *hardly* sometimes giving sleep to their eyes, or slumber to their eye-lids? They rise early, and sit up late[†], that they may lay their schemes aright, and that their projects may take; and that they may get a considerable gain. But why all this labour and solicitude, this toil and anxious care; why all these innumerable projects, when in a little time men pass out of this world, and *all their thoughts perish*[‡], and all their schemes become abortive? How few are there who will make a bargain for eternity? that will seek that durable riches and righteousness[†] which will last for ever? that will furnish themselves with those ornaments which will never wither? with that crown which will never fade? those garments which will never wear out? with those great advantages which will adorn their souls, which will feed and nourish them, and give them satisfaction and content? If a man could compass the whole world, and gain it to himself, what would it signify amidst the torture of diseases? what would it signify when his conscience is awakened? But truth and religion will support a man under the sharpest pains of his body, and under the troubles and

[†] Psal. 127. 2.

[‡] Psal. 146. 4.

† Prov. 8. 18.

horrors of his mind ; will calm his conscience, and give him joy and serenity in the hour of death. This is therefore *to lay up a good foundation against the time to come*^u ; *to seek after the truth, true knowledge, the true religion, as for hid treasure* ; and to count nothing too dear to part with on the account of truth. What pity is it that so few will engage in this good bargain, tho there is so much profit and advantage to be had ? And,

2. What is said of truth in general, that in some measure may be applied to every truth in particular. How many are for increasing their estates, for augmenting their trades ; and yet how few who profess christianity, are for adding one grace to another, for improving in grace and knowledge continually ? Do we think we have truth enough, because we believe perhaps, and practise some of the greatest and most essential truths of religion ? Should we not be suspicious of ourselves ? Do I not embrace some error in my mind ? Do I not retain *a lye in my right hand* ? Am I not defective in some religious practise which God requires of me ? Am I not short of my duty in this and that particular ? Do I not embrace some false notions of which I ought to be divested ? *Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect to all God's commands*^v.

^u 1 Tim. 6. 19.

| ^v Psal. 119. 6.

Let me therefore most earnestly exhort those who have not bought the truth, who are not thus interested in the true religion, that they would not for a moment defer making so good a bargain ; especially considering it is uncertain how long the offer may be made. And for those who have bought the truth, who are willing to lay down all at the call of Christ, rather than part with the truth ; as they have advantages already, and greater to expect, so let me desire them to examine themselves seriously, whether every truth is not thus worth buying ; to examine whether they are acquainted with the mind of God in every particular thing, which he requires them to believe and practise. Let every one be jealous of himself, and examine his own heart ; and whenever the providence of God furnishes him with means of conviction, let him *buy the truth, and sell it not.*





SERMON XIII.

Preach'd at PINNERS-HALL, Feb. 10, 170 $\frac{4}{5}$.

PROV. xxiii. 23.

The former part of the verse.

Buy the truth, and sell it not.

The second SERMON on this text.



AM now to go to the other part of the argument. As I have before persuaded you to *buy the truth*, so now I am to dissuade you from *selling it*. Some persons have made a proficiency in the knowledge of religion, and then have declined it; *and it were better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to have turned their backs upon it* ^w. *They did run well; who hinder'd them* ^x? as the apostle speaks concerning some: and our Lord Jesus says of those who are compared to the stony ground, that *they received the word with joy: they sprang up, and gave a*

^w 2 Pet. 2. 21.

^x Gal. 5. 7.

hopeful

hopeful prospect of fruitfulness ; but on a sudden they were wither'd : *when the sun arose, when persecution befel them for the sake of the truth, they were offended*^y ; found some occasion or another to complain of the truth, and rather than suffer, were willing to part with it ; to *sell it* at any rate, rather than keep it when it was attended with such difficulty. Of these the apostle speaks, that they *make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience*^z. They were engaged in a very good trade and employment, if I may so term it ; they were like *merchants seeking goodly pearls*^a ; but by their folly they run themselves upon a rock, and squander away the best and greatest treasure. Because they love the things of this world, and pursue them, they abandon the trade of heaven ; they forsake the pursuit of that treasure which cannot fail, cannot corrupt, cannot be stolen ; and seek trifles which are not worth the acquisition of those who are capable of nobler employments. 'Tis true, where truth, that is, the true religion, takes intire possession of a man's very soul, not only of his head but of his heart, not only informs his judgment, but changes his heart ; then it will never be intirely lost. 'Tis like so much leaven that makes a change upon the whole soul, and transmutes it into its own likeness. When *pure religion and undefiled*^b thus enters into a man's soul, it

^y Luke 8. 13.^z 1 Tim. 1. 19.^a Mat. 13. 45.^b James 1. 27.

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works very powerful effects ; as the wise man says, *When wisdom entreteth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant to thy soul, discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee* °. When a man has not only a superficial view of truth, or a transient desire after it ; is not only taken with the beauty of it for a few moments, but upon the most deliberate thoughts finds it infinitely amiable, and therefore embraces it, and devotes all the powers of his soul to the interest of religion ; when *the truth has made him free*, and engaged him in the ways of holiness and virtue in opposition to vice and wickedness ; then there is so sure and solid a foundation laid, that that man will never *sell the truth*. When any proposal of this kind is made to him, or when any temptation comes in the way, and calls him aside from the knowledge and practise of the truth, he'll be ready to answer with the disciples, *Lord, whither shall we go, thou hast the words of eternal life* ^d ? The pleasures of sin and the advantages of the world will appear so mean and little in the view of a man who is so deeply convinced, and has had such a taste and relish of divine things, that *having drank the old wine, he will not straitway desire new, because he says the old is better* °.

° Prov. 2. 10, 11.

^d John 6. 68.

| ° Luke 5. 39.

But

But yet, tho this be true of religion in general, even good men may expose themselves to danger by parting with certain truths for a time ; and it may be they may part with this or that particular truth thro' the course of their lives : but then this will be such a damage to them, that tho their souls are *saved*, yet it will be so as by fire ^f ; and tho they arrive at the kingdom of God, they will be called the *least in that kingdom* ^g, for not having acted so conscienciously, and with such integrity as they ought. And therefore this exhortation will be of use to us all : whether we have embraced the truth with that fervency of spirit which has been describ'd, or not, we are still to be warned against abandoning it ; and those who are most secure, and most confirmed in holiness and knowledge, yet may fall into divers errors and snares, unless they keep well upon their guard. Besides, notwithstanding the efficacy of the divine grace, and the measures God has taken to secure the standing of his people, that they may not be utterly discouraged amidst the infirmities they feel ; the way and course he takes to confirm and establish us, is by using certain means which he proposes to us, and which are to work upon us after such a manner as may encourage all the industry and care imaginable. So that this exhortation is of force unto us

^f 1 Cor. 3. 15.

^g Mat. 5. 19.

all : for if we can be careless about a matter of this consequence, about the truth, about the true religion, or indeed any part of it, we have reason to suspect whether we ever bought the truth, whether we were ever sensible of its excellency, whether we were willing to part with all for the sake of it ; for if we have, then 'tis to be hop'd we shall never be so foolish as to *sell it*. And besides, as I have intimated, it will be a dangerous thing, and may be a great damage to us to part with any one true doctrine, with any one true precept and institution : and therefore we are to observe, that the exhortation extends itself to all truths, whether relating to doctrines or morals ; it holds good, that we are to *buy the truth, but not to sell it*.

Having spoken these things by way of preliminary, I shall now dissuade you from *selling the truth* by these several arguments. I shall endeavour to shew,

I. That there is nothing so valuable as truth itself is ; and therefore 'tis impossible that any equivalent can be proposed to you.

II. That upon the supposition, any thing equivalent can be proposed, which should be as valuable in itself ; 'tis certain, that all the things which can be proposed in exchange for truth, are nothing comparable to it, in regard of its usefulness and advantage to you.

III. That

III. That not only is there nothing can be proposed which is a fit price for truth; but if you should sell it, whatsoever you may pretend to gain, the sale of it will be attended with infinite damage and misery. Not only are the things little, comparatively, which can be given you for truth, but those little things will be attended with great consequences of misery; so that you had better have been intirely without them.

Now every one will grant this must be an ill bargain if the case be so circumstanced. No man in his wits will sell a treasure, who can't have at least something that is equivalent to the thing he sells. No prudent man will purchase a thing which is neither valuable in itself, nor useful to him, especially if it be attended with evil consequences; if great damages will ensue to him hereby. Sometimes a man may part with one thing that he may enjoy another, because the other may be more worth; but it is certainly a folly to part with what he has, if he can't have what is of equal value in exchange for it. Sometimes a man may be glad to part with a treasure that he has, for something which is of equal worth in itself, and more useful to him. And sometimes tho the value be not so great, or the usefulness so much as a man expected; yet if there be no dangerous effects annexed to it, if his
bargain

bargain be not very prudent, yet it may appear not to be very bad, because there is no fatal consequence attending it; but when a man shall part with that which shall involve him, by parting with it, in great difficulties and miseries, when he shall receive abundance of damage by selling, and at the same time but a very small benefit in comparison of the advantages he has parted with; this doubles the misery, and consequently shews the folly of the bargain to be so much the greater. This will appear plainly to you if you reflect upon what has been said already concerning the excellency and the value of truth, and its usefulness to us. But let me speak to these things a little more particularly.

I. There is nothing so valuable as truth itself is; and therefore it is impossible that any equivalent can be proposed to us. What can be offer'd us in exchange for truth? Either it must be that with which our minds may be furnish'd instead of truth, that which may take the place of it there; or else it must be some other advantage another way. As for what we can exchange truth for, which may take the room thereof in our minds; it is so far from being of equal value, that we had a thousand times better be without it: for not only will ignorance ensue upon the parting with truth, but errors and prejudices take its place; and these are worse than ignorance,

norance, and therefore are so far from being of any value, that they are very criminal, and consequently must be very disadvantageous; that ignorance, which is accompanied with error about the way of salvation, is very dangerous: so that no man in his senses, no rational creature can think that error, and folly, and prejudice, can take the place of truth deservedly; and that it is worth a man's while to part with the one, that his mind may be filled with the other. *For the soul to be without knowledge, is not good*^h, the wise man says: but for it to be stuff'd with prejudices and erroneous conceptions, this is much worse, because this makes way for abundance of crimes. Now no man in his senses can be supposed to be desirous to part with truth, merely for the sake of errors and prejudices.

On the other hand, therefore, the course of men is, when they part with truth, to propose to themselves some advantage another way; not an advantage to their minds, but an advantage to their bodies; not to adorn their minds, but that they may be capable of setting themselves off the better in this world. Sensual pleasures, honours, friends, riches, these are the things for which men barter away the truth; these are the gay things which affect their senses, and make them desirous of such an exchange as is the highest folly in the sight of God, and

in the account of all wise men. If we believe our Saviour, he tells us so: *For what, says he, shall it profit a man, tho he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* What profit is there in any thing that can be proposed to us in comparison of truth? That which I am shewing you at present, is only in the general, that nothing can be proposed to us which can be equivalent in its value to truth. Either it must be error and prejudice instead of it, which one would think men should not embrace for its own sake; or else it must be temporal advantages, and these are very small, in their own nature far below what truth is. I might shew you this many ways.

Truth is the ornament of the mind, it is of a spiritual nature; it is that which renders men so much the more like to God, than otherwise they could be. Man is made after the image of God in regard of the reason with which he was endow'd, his natural image; and then his religious image, in that he was made holy. Now the truth which we are speaking of is light and knowledge, excellent in itself in regard of its own nature; and then as it is religious truth, it is of the highest consequence, and renders us so much the more like God, as he is infinitely holy. For a man to be furnish'd with knowledge and holiness, this is to make him

¹ Mat. 16. 26.

look like a copy taken from the divine original, so far as a creature of his rank may be made to resemble God; this makes him bear the image of his maker. Now what is it for a man to be possessed of a large estate, of much land and many houses, to have great heaps of treasure, and abundance of jewels, and gay clothes; to have a numerous retinue, splendid equipage, and his table furnished with the most delicious banquets? What are these but sensible things, which the most foolish and the most wicked, the most despicable, the most loathsome and vile amongst mankind may enjoy as well as he? These are not the things which can distinguish one rational creature from another, so as to make him more excellent. So that in their own nature, as they are sensible things, and belong unto our outward state here, they are not comparable to this which is the furniture of the soul; these ornaments of truth and knowledge, righteousness and holiness; these jewels, this treasure which is durable and will last for ever. It is easy for any one who will consider the matter a little, to see that all divine truths are far above all sensible enjoyments whatsoever: therefore we cannot make an exchange; we cannot drive a bargain but it will be a foolish one, if we *sell the truth*. But then,

II. As truth appears in its own nature to be more excellent than any thing which can be

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be proposed to us in exchange for it ; so if we consider its great usefulness to us, as well as its native excellency, the advantage is still on the side of truth. It is the usefulness of a thing, that determines us, sometimes in some exigencies of life, to part with a thing of more intrinsic worth, for that which in its own nature is less valuable. Thus a prince, by reason of his excessive thirst in the great heat of summer, was willing to part with his crown for a cup of cold water. Thus *Esau sold his birthright for a mess of pottage*^k. He acted indeed very foolishly ; but this shews how importunately men desire things to answer their pressing necessities, and which they think may be of immediate use and advantage to them. Therefore tho there is nothing equivalent to truth in its own nature, yet perhaps some might imagine that there are other things more useful, or that may be so upon some occasions ; and on this account the exchange might be thought prudent : but here 'tis so far from that, that there is nothing can be useful and advantageous to us in comparison of truth. Indeed it must be own'd the knowledge of truth will not make a man rich in this world, will not surround him with honours, and furnish him with a pompous equipage, or spread his table with the delicacies of a sensual banquet. We read in the scripture of poor wise men, and some of them who

^k Gen. 25. 33. Heb. 12. 16.

did a great deal of good ; as, *the wise man that saved the city, and yet was neglected ; none remembred that poor wise man*¹. 'Tis no uncommon thing to see persons of excellent endowments contemned, and make but a poor figure in this world. But then we must consider that man has a twofold capacity, as has been intimated before : we have souls as well as bodies ; and that which is useful to our souls, is infinitely to be preferred before that which is useful only to our bodies. We are to live in eternity as well as to live in time ; and that which is useful to prepare us for another world, is therefore mightily to be preferred before that which can only accommodate us here. He who employs all his time and care to live easily and quietly here, and makes no provision and preparation for a better life, is guilty of egregious folly. This is preferring temporal things to spiritual, preferring trifles to the most substantial and valuable treasures ; preferring time to eternity, a few moments to that state which will never end. 'Tis as if a man should chuse counters rather than great quantities of the most precious metals, pebbles rather than pearls and diamonds.

Thus if we consider how useful truth is to a man, we shall find that the wise man's counsel is good, that we should *buy the truth, and not sell it* ; for truth is better, and

¹ Eccles. 9. 15.

of greater advantage to us than any thing we can get in exchange for it. Truth will furnish and ennoble our minds better than all the titles which can be given us here: it will rectify and govern our hearts better than all the maxims of human policy and prudence: it will make us more truly excellent than all human accomplishments whatsoever; for it will change our hearts, and render us conformable to the image of God: it will enrich us more than all the treasures of both the Indies; for were a man able to amass them together, they could not make him rich to eternity. There is a *treasure* which is *laid up in heaven*, and yet enjoyed by a religious man, in some good degree, while here upon earth. These are ornaments which *the moth cannot eat*; these are *treasures which the rust cannot consume*; which *thieves cannot break thro', and steal*^m. That man may be counted politick, who *makes himself temporal friends with the mammon of unrighteousness*ⁿ; who gets the *friendship of this world, which is enmity against God*: but he is infinitely more wise, who so makes himself friends with the things of this world, if he has them, as that he may have the friendship of God; and if he has not the things of this world, yet if he has truth, he has such a treasure in his soul that he has the friendship of God notwithstanding, and will have it for ever. Truth makes

^m Mat. 6. 19.| ⁿ Luke 16. 9.

him know how to use the world, so as not to abuse it °, if God gives it him. Divine knowledge, and the wisdom which is from above, shews him how he shall enjoy the things of this world after a manner becoming one who professes the name of Christ ; how he shall transmute, as it were, temporal riches into eternal treasure by his charity : and if he has not the things of this world, yet he shall be enriched and adorned with truth ; truth shall be his shield and buckler, and such a defense as shall enable him to honour God peculiarly in the time of his suffering and affliction. What is there therefore in this world that can be compared to truth as to its usefulness ? it will make us happy here, and happy for ever. If a man could enjoy all the riches of the world, they can't give him ease in bodily pains ; much less can they allay the agonies of his conscience when *the terrors of the Lord are set before him*. But the true religion, which will support a man under all afflictions of life, and agonies of death ; that will fill the soul with *joy unspeakable, and full of glory* ¶, when all things round are full of terror and astonishment : that is capable of making a man glory in infirmities, I mean, in his sufferings and afflictions, as the apostle did ; *and count it all joy, when he falls under those temptations* ¶, because of the excellency of the

° 1 Cor. 7. 31.

¶ 1 Pet. 1. 8.

¶ James 1. 2.

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knowledge of God, which furnishes him with that which can answer Satan, and make him *more than a conqueror* over all the powers of darkness. And if the advantages of religion are great in this world, what will the advantages be in the world to come? what a return does the soul, as it were, make in this respect? He who trades for truth, not only enjoys much of it here, but has a wonderful return secured for him in heaven. What *a good foundation* does he lay up against the time to come? And who can describe the advantages of that world of which we here know so very little? and yet that little which we know can *fill us with joy unspeakable, and full of glory*^r. What an advantage, to be rendred capable of enjoying God, and of enjoying him for ever? of having the capacities and powers of our souls prepared and disposed by truth for the enjoyment of God, and having those enlarged capacities filled with that fulness? of having those treasures which will make us rich for ever? an inheritance in the New Jerusalem, whose streets are paved with pure gold, whose gates are pearls, and whose walls are of precious stones^s? of having an interest in that blessed state, in that blessed society, from whence all sorrow and pain is banish'd; and where joy and serenity, peace and pleasure reign for evermore without

^r 1 Tim. 6. 9.

^s 1 Pet. 1. 8.

^s Rev. 21. 18—21.

any interruption, and without any cessation?

III. That truth is not to be sold upon any terms, appears farther; in that if we should sell it for any of the things of this world, as we should make a bad bargain to part with heaven, with the privileges of grace and glory, for the trifles of this perishing world, so the bargain would still appear more foolish, in that parting with truth we should part with our own souls; that is, our souls must be made miserable for ever.

If we love the world, the love of the Father is not in us^t; the love of truth is not in us. Now if we will part with truth, we not only part with that which would make us happy, but in gaining the world we gain only a little sensible pleasure, a few friends who perhaps will fail us in a time of adversity; or a little money which will perhaps fly from us before we go out of the world, but however we must part with it then; a few sensible delights and gratifications which will leave us when we are old, and perhaps may forsake us long before, as it often happens when some chronic distemper fastens itself in our bones and sinews. So that this must needs be a very ill bargain, to part with truth for the trifling things of this world, especially when we shall sustain so much damage by the exchange. It was

^t 1 John 2. 15.

great folly for Esau to part with his birth-right for a little pottage to satisfy the immediate craving of his bodily appetite. What was the consequence of it? Why, he parted with spiritual privileges and advantages: he parted with the blessing. This was a great folly indeed, and brought great miseries upon him.

And here I should more particularly represent to you, what great damages ensue to those who part with the truth in this life: and then, that the consequence, in the world to come, is the greatest misery of all.

I. By parting with the truth, great damages ensue in this life: a man parts with his ornament, and so exposes himself to reproach. He is not only slighted by good men, but many times those who have no great love to truth themselves, yet reproach such as apostatize, when the manner of their conduct makes it appear they did it for the love of this world? When a man parts with truth, he parts with his armour, and so is exposed to many afflictions and miseries: he is liable to the temptations of Satan; and in parting with this or that, or the other particular truth, a breach is made, and a tendency to part with the whole, intirely to *make shipwreck of faith, and a good conscience* ^u. And this is the way to be given up to hardness of heart, and blindness of mind: *because men receive not the truth in the love*

of it, but are willing to part with it, God gives them up to strong delusions that they may believe a lye^v; and this is a most dreadful condition. And as he parts with his ornament and armour, so with his joy. For what joy can a rational soul take, unless it be in things of a suitable nature, in the knowledge of truth, in the enjoyment of God, in religion? This is a pleasure becoming a rational soul: and tho a man may get some sensible pleasure by the things of this life, yet this is not comparable to the other. A man in parting with truth parts with his best friend, the God of truth: they who do so, forsake their own mercies. For a man to *sell the truth*, is indeed to *sell himself to do wickedness*^w: for if the mind be not influenced by the knowledge of truth, how shall the heart, how shall the life be governed? It is therefore for a man to lay himself open to the commission of vice and folly: and what will be *the end of these things but death*?

For a man to abandon but one truth is very dangerous, and is a high provocation to God. And if you say, 'tis *but a little truth*^x, and not essential to salvation, but a man may be saved without it; I answer, 'tis not for us to determine without what part of truth persons may be saved. No doubt but there are those who are ig-

^v 2 Theff. 2. 10, 11.

^w 2 Kings 17. 17.

| ^x Gen. 19. 20:

ignorant of some particular truths, and yet are saved: but can any one say, that if he acts directly against his light and conscience, against such or such a duty, that living and dying so, he may be saved? If he loves God, why does he not hate and abandon every sin, and value every truth, and every duty? Can he be said to love God who loves his error, who loves his lust, who loves his folly, and loves this world more than truth? Can he be said to love God who *sells the truth*? How base is such a proceeding as this? and how incapable shall he be to satisfy his conscience, upon good grounds, that all is well with him? No; let us not imagine, that if we act contrary to the sentiments of our consciences, and the clear light of God's word in any one particular thing, we can approve our hearts to God that we are his people. I don't say but such may be tempted sometimes thus to do; but can they be easy till they are recovered out of this temptation? Can they upon good and solid grounds make it appear that they are the children of God, if they have not *respect to all his commands*? Can they make it out that they love God, unless they love to do his will, tho in opposition to all the proffers and advantageous invitations of this world? They must postpone all things, and *count all but dung and dross*^z, in comparison of the truth. For a man to *sell the truth*, and thereby to part

y Psal. 119, 61

I z Phil. 3. 8.

with the privilege of communion with God, the great advantage of being let into the mysteries of religion more and more ; (for they who know God, are like to know him more ; *then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord*^a) this is a great damage indeed. But then,

2. How great is the damage in the world to come ? Many persons have lost much of the benefit of communion with God here, because they have not so strictly walked up to the knowledge they have received ; because they have not answered a good conscience, as they ought to have done, in some particular duty or truth. But the damage here, tho' great in itself, yet is little in comparison of that which will follow in another world. For a man to *sell the truth*, to part with the true religion, to abandon himself to error and vice, is a most dangerous thing ; and consequently to part with any particular truth, which is the way to part with the rest : thus to sell the truth, I say, is most hazardous, because this is a course which will involve a man at last in endless misery. What will our Lord Jesus say to such persons at the great day of judgment ? “ You
“ were ashamed of me and my words before
“ men ; and now will I be ashamed of you
“ before my Father, and before his holy
“ angels^b : depart from me ye cursed, ye

^a Hof. 6. 3.

| ^b Mark 8. 38.

“ workers

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“workers of iniquity, into everlasting fire^c.” There are some certain truths which are contemptible in the world; and if a man should embrace them, he would be despised and pointed at: but shall we, for fear of the contempt of our fellow-creatures, venture our Lord’s being ashamed of us at the day of judgment? Is it not better for us to endure reproach from foolish men, than for our Lord Jesus to be ashamed of us, and to deny us at the great day of his appearing? What a damage will this be to us? here will be a loss indeed? To *sell the truth* for this world, and when we come upon the brink of the other, then to want that great treasure, then to want that great jewel and crown, that excellent ornament and robe, and so *to be turned into hell with the nations that forget God^d*; how great a misery will this be? Don’t you think that the loss of the presence of God for ever will be a great punishment in itself? Don’t you think that sinking into a state of misery, and there to be confin’d for ever, and to have no hope of getting out of that condition, will be an insupportable torment? To have utter despair in the midst of that torment, what can be imagined more terrible than this? Where there is no glimmering of light, no dawn of hope, no intermission of sorrow and misery? There must all those be who have *made ship-*

^c Mat. 25. 41.

1 ^d Psal. 9. 17.

wreck of faith, and of a good conscience^e; who have denied the name and truth of God, who have abandoned themselves to error and vice: there must their portion be. As they loved not truth, so they shall never enjoy it: they loved not to receive the law from the mouth of the Lord, they loved not to be under the conduct and discipline of his truth; therefore they shall never enjoy his presence, in whose favour is life^f. Because they loved darkness, vanity, folly, error and vice, therefore darkness, the blackness of darkness shall be their portion for ever^g. Because they were lovers of pleasures, more than lovers of God^h, they shall have torments and perpetual anguish thro'out endless ages. Oh how many will there be, who will reflect upon their folly at that time, and say they made a foolish bargain indeed, to sell the truth, and thereby purchase to themselves everlasting misery? To sell that which was so excellent and valuable for a few trifling pleasures which so soon vanish'd away, and to inherit instead thereof substantial torment and misery for ever?

I cannot imagine that any one of you remains, after this, unconcerned, that 'tis the most foolish bargain in the world *to sell the truth*; as I hope you were convinced before, from the other parts of the words, that 'tis the happiest bargain to buy it. Let me

^e 1 Tim. i. 19.

^f Psal. 30. 5.

^g Jude 13.

^h 2 Tim. 3. 4.

conclude

conclude therefore with a few brief reflections.

I. Hence it appears, that there is a great deal of folly and madness under the sun. The wise man made many serious and sorrowful reflections upon the folly of the world; and every man who has but a small degree of wisdom, may make some reflections of this kind, if he does but observe the conduct of men. Where is there almost a man to be found, who is earnestly desirous to know that truth which is of the highest consequence? How are libraries search'd, ancient authors ransack'd, money expended, instruments made, masters sought from one quarter of the world to another, for the improvement of arts and sciences; such as the mathematicks, for instance, and natural philosophy? And what are these in comparison of the truth of which we are speaking, that will make a man *wise to salvation*¹? And yet who will inquire after this? who will cross the seas to search after the true religion? who will spend any considerable part of his temporal substance in this pursuit? who will use any care and industry to find out the best instructor? who will employ any great part of his time in an inquiry after truth, and make religion his study and business? who will use all probable means

¹ 2 Tim. 3. 15.

to arrive to a good degree of knowledge in those truths which are of the highest consequence and importance? We see by this how the relish of mens minds is spoiled. Curiosity leads them a great way after the knowledge of other things: but the knowledge of God they don't relish; the knowledge of those divine truths which are the most valuable, the most advantageous and useful, and which will make them most certainly happy. This gives us a lamentable prospect of the generality of the world.

2. There are others who have been taken with the truth, with the beauty and excellency thereof, and have made some advances in their knowledge of it, and regards to it: and these are to be blamed that they pursue it with no more vigour; that they spend no more time and thought, and meditation, and prayer, *to ask of God wisdom, who giveth liberally, and upbraideth not*¹; that they consult not persons who may be capable of explaining the scripture, as well as *search the scripture* themselves, *whether the things are so or not*^m. How great pity, that so many are *settled upon their lees*ⁿ; that they have no jealousy of themselves, lest some evil prejudices should bias them; that they are not willing to come up to the highest pitch of truth? Is it not the most precious jewel,

¹ James 1. 5.

^m Acts 17. 11.

ⁿ Jer. 48. 11.

and to be sought with the greatest diligence? Were men but *searching for it as for hid treasure* °, it were to be hoped there would be great discoveries made in religion, as well as in other things. Our age will be remarkable to posterity for very considerable improvements in several useful parts of human literature: and why should we not hope to have much greater advances in truth of a religious kind, if we could but see men have a mind to seek the truth for its own lustre and excellency, as well as its usefulness to them? *O that there were such an heart in them* ^p!

3. This shews us what cause such persons have to rejoice, who have made the bargain mention'd in our text; who have *bought the truth*, and are resolved *not to sell it*. Whatsoever you have parted with, to *buy the truth*, you have cause to rejoice, as that *merchant who sought goodly pearls; and having found one of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it* ^q. It behoves you to rejoice, because you have found the treasure. If you have found the true religion, the fundamental principles of christianity, and these have been practically improved upon your souls, so that you are changed and renewed in your minds; happy are you indeed. Be persuaded continually to keep upon your minds the remembrance how great a

° Prov. 2. 4.

^p Deut. 5. 29.

^q Mat. 13. 45.

treasure truth is, that you may never enter into a treaty with any body whatsoever about parting with it; but that you may, with abhorrence, reject all proposals of such a nature, as knowing there is nothing in the whole world comparable to truth.

To conclude : Let me exhort you all, who have received great advantages by the knowledge of the truth, to pursue the same advantages yet farther, and never think you know enough : never be too proud to learn, never be uneasy if any body attempt to inform you that you are in an error ; but hear all things diligently, *prove all things, hold fast that which is good* : let it be your earnest desire to understand *the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God*¹. And as for those who have not considered the excellency of religious truths, who can't say, upon good grounds, that their minds are so well furnish'd therewith, as that they have made the happy bargain for eternity, that they have parted with their own errors and prejudices, and have entred into a solemn covenant with God, to be for him and for his truth whatsoever it cost them ; if there be such here who can't say they have done this, that they have thus embraced the true religion with fervency of mind ; why, now is the time if ever, to consider of it. It is perhaps late ; for you should

¹ 1 Thess. 5. 21.

| ¹ Rom. 12. 2.

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have thought of these things before : you have wasted a great deal of precious time perhaps, and trifled away those moments which should have been employ'd for your everlasting advantage. Let me beseech you therefore now seriously and impartially to reflect on your past conduct. What have you been seeking ? where have you placed your happiness ? and where have you sought your profit ? *What advantage would it be to you to gain the whole world, and lose your own souls ?* If you *sell the truth*, what can you get that will be worth the having ? *Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom : and with all thy getting, get understanding* †. Let me intreat you to consider the value, and usefulness, and duration of it. Consider the folly of others, that you may avoid it ; consider the wisdom of those who have embraced the truth ; consider the examples which have been set before you in the divine word. Consider how Abraham forsook his father's house to follow God ; and that the patriarchs thought themselves happy in finding God and truth, tho they were but *pilgrims and strangers upon earth* †. Moses despised the pleasures of Egypt ; *refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, esteeming the reproach of Christ, and of his truth, greater riches than the treasures of Egypt* †. All the patriarchs and the prophets were

† Mat. 16. 26.

† Prov. 4. 7.

‡ Heb. 11. 13.

‡ Ver. 23—26.

willing to suffer for the sake of truth, rather than to deny it upon any occasion. And our Lord Jesus Christ himself is above all the most eminent example. *For this end*, says he, *came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth* ^w: and he persisted in his testimony, altho he was sentenced to die for it. It behoves us therefore to imitate this great pattern: for, *for this end were we born, and for this end we came into the world, that we should bear witness to the truth.* The apostles laid down their lives for the truth: and how did they labour to possess the minds of others with that truth they had valued themselves? How did they suffer, to confirm that true doctrine they preach'd? And how do they now enjoy the glorious advantages in heaven, of having *confessed the name of Christ before men*, and of *not being ashamed of his words*? Let us go and do likewise; imitate their example, *buy the truth* at any rate, *and not sell it* upon any consideration whatsoever.

☞ John 18. 37.



S E R



SERMON XIV.

Of loving the LORD our GOD.

MARK xii. 30.

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength : this is the first commandment.



OUR blessed Saviour, as we see in the former part of this chapter, had been answering persons of divers sects among the Jews, who had moved difficulties to him, with a design to insnare him. Particularly in the 18th verse, and so on, we have an account of a question asked him by the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection of the dead ; founded on a case of seven brethren, who, according to the law of Moses, had taken the same woman to wife, and died successively : from which they inferred, that this woman surviving them all, could not be capable of having every one of them at the resurrection ; and consequently, that there

could be no such thing as the resurrection of the dead. *In the resurrection therefore, when they shall rise, whose wife shall she be of them? for the seven had her to wife.* Our Lord easily removes this difficulty, by telling them it was founded upon a wrong supposition. They supposed that in the resurrection-state there would be *marrying, and giving in marriage*; and the same relations as in this life. *Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God? For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels of God in heaven.* And then our Lord goes on to prove the resurrection of the dead from that character God gave of himself when he appear'd to Moses in the bush: *I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob* *. From which he thus reasons: *He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; ye therefore do greatly err.* When he had answered the Sadducees, then came to him one of the Scribes; that is, one of the doctors of the law, one of their principal ministers: *who having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, ask'd him, Which is the first commandment of all?* This seems to have been a question frequently agitated among the Scribes, who were learned in the law. Our blessed Saviour answers: *The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel, the Lord*

* Exod. 3. 6.

our God is one Lord. This is only the preface to that first and great commandment which is recorded in the book of Deuteronomy. But in the words of our text there is the command itself: *And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment* ^y.

This preface, *the Lord our God is one Lord*, declares the unity of the Godhead; and therefore the perfection of the divine nature, which is the ground of this first, or great commandment: for it is the perfection of the divine nature which renders God infinitely amiable, and therefore makes it necessary that he should be loved with all the powers of intelligent creatures. This carries with it a great deal of evidence. And the scribe himself could not deny it: for he says, in the 32d verse, *Well, master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God, and there is none other but he.* Ver. 33. *And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices.*

This, I say, seems to be so evident, that one would think there were no need of proving a matter so plain, and incontestable. And yet how plain soever this duty is, of lo-

^y Deut. 6. 4.

ving God, and loving him after such a manner as is contained in this commandment ; men are so defective in this duty (as indeed they are in all duties ; and in whatsoever duty they are deficient, 'tis because they are deficient in this, of love to God) that it is necessary to insist particularly upon it. For if the minds of men are rightly disposed by this principle of love to God, all the duties they perform will be discharged after the best manner : and, on the contrary, if they are defective in this, how splendid soever their performances may appear, and how strictly soever they may seem to comply with the divine commands, it may be said, *their hearts are not right before God* ².

In explaining this then, which our Saviour declares to be *the first and greatest commandment of all*, it will be proper for us to consider these three things,

- I. The nature of this love which we owe to God ; what it is *to love the Lord our God*.
- II. The extent and manner of this love ; *to love him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength*.
- III. The dignity and importance of this commandment, as 'tis called *the first and greatest*, *This is the first commandment*.

² AGs 8. 21.

'Tis plain that our blessed Lord refers to the 6th of Deuteronomy, where you have the same words in effect; *ver. 4, 5. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.* And to the same purpose again, in *chap. 13. ver. 3. For the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul.* And again, *chap. 30. ver. 6. And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; that thou may'st live.* And you will find, in divers passages of this book, that this love is farther explained by the ways of expressing it: *to love God, and to fear him, and serve him^a; to love him, and keep his charge^b; to love him, and walk in his ways^c; to love him, and obey his voice^d:* these, and such like terms, are made use of by Moses to signify how our love to God ought to be expressed.

But now I come particularly to consider the first thing proposed; namely,

I. The nature of this love which we owe to God; *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God.*

^a Deut. 10. 12.

^b Chap. 11. 1.

^c Ver. 22.

^d Chap. 13. 4.

As to the object of our love, it is the true God : and here he is spoken of as having a relation to us, called *the Lord our God*. This has a particular respect indeed to the people of Israel, whom God singled out from other nations, to bestow upon them special privileges ; and with whom he entered into covenant, to be their God and king, to protect them from their enemies, to give them the confluence of many temporal blessings, to continue his worship amongst them, and thereby to bestow upon them spiritual blessings. And wherever there is a nation whom God favours after this manner, who have the opportunity of knowing his will, who have the means of grace, and the advantages of the true religion ; it may be said, that God is *the God* of that people, by the favours of his providence.

But there is a nearer relation to God spoken of in the New Testament : a relation contracted by means of Christ Jesus, the only mediator and reconciler between God and men ; thro' whom they become *the children of God*, by adoption, by regeneration, and by their conformity to God in righteousness and true holiness. 'Tis true, that these are under the strongest ties and obligations imaginable to love God, *who has first loved them*, and bestowed such great privileges and favours upon them. *Behold, what manner of love is this, that we should be called the sons of God !* When we

1 John 3. 1.

consider

consider that this relation is founded in the blood of the Mediator, that to make reconciliation he was pleased to *lay down his own life*; well may it be said, God has shewed his love to be greater than the love of men. Friendship among men never can advance so far, as that a person so superior to mankind as our Lord Jesus was, should lay down his life for those who are infinitely inferior to him. How gloriously does the love of God manifest itself, that when *we were sinners Christ died for us*; and when *we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son*? So that the nearer the relation is between God and us, and the greater obligations are laid upon us, by the manner of contracting such a relation, the stronger is the obligation upon us to love God.

But indeed, if we were to consider this as a principle of natural religion only; our obligation to love God would easily appear. For as the God we worship is *the only living and true God*, the same God whom Israel worshipped heretofore, a God of infinite perfection, *besides whom there is no God*; and as he is likewise our creator and preserver; so he not only is the proper object of our worship in respect of our fear, and other religious regards, but has an undoubted right to the tribute of our love too: as ~~we~~ we are his creatures, so he is our God. So that besides the obligations we are under on

¹ John 15. 13. Rom. 5. 7—10.

account of the favours of his providence, and the riches of his grace ; take men as in the state of nature, as creatures form'd by the hand of the Almighty, and supported by his power every moment of their being, they are under this obligation to love God : for he is *their God* ; that is, the author of their being. But when all these things concur together, then the obligation is stronger. When we are not only related to him in common, as all mankind are, as he is the author of our being, as he is the father of men, and their preserver ; when we are not only under these obligations in common with others, but are peculiarly favoured with the knowledge of the way of salvation, and the true worship of God ; and together with many other marks of the divine favour, have that grace bestowed upon us, by which we are *turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God* ^g ; when he hath taken us into his family, that we should become *his children* ^h, and be allied to him in an *everlasting covenant, order'd in all things, and sure* ⁱ : as every one of these obligations, separately considered, administers a strong motive to love God ; how binding must the engagement be when they are all united together ?

But I shall have occasion to speak of the motives to this duty more hereafter ; and therefore this shall suffice for the explication

^g Acts 26. 18.

^h Rom. 8. 16, 17.

ⁱ 2 Sam. 23. 5.

of the object, *the Lord our God*; because this duty is founded upon our relation to God either by nature or by grace, or both considered together.

I shall therefore speak now particularly to the act of *loving God*, and consider its nature. Now as love is a principal spring of the soul, it has a powerful sway upon the rest of the passions, and determines them according as it is fixed itself. And therefore we shall find that the exercise of the other affections of the soul being under the government of love; that is made use of in scripture as comprehending the various duties we owe to God, and therefore deserves to be more particularly considered; especially since our Saviour speaks of it as *the first and great commandment*. And if we consult what passes in our own souls, in regard of the objects we love, we shall find that love does differently modify itself, and therefore may be distinguished into several sorts.

I. That love which is called *a love of desire*. As we are intelligent creatures, we have a desire to be happy. This is natural to us, and there is no rational being without it: 'tis a natural desire, of which we cannot divest ourselves. Even when men offer violence to themselves, it is from a desire they have to be happy; 'tis to put an end to their present troubles, or to avoid some greater misery than what they are in, according to their apprehension, that they ex-

ercise

ercise such cruelty upon themselves. Indeed their reasoning is intirely wrong: for as every man has received his life from God, so it is not at his own disposal; and he ought to do what in him lies to preserve it. Yet this is certain, that those who do this, do it to avoid a misery they think worse than death; and consequently 'tis to lessen their misery, and so is from a desire of happiness, or a desire of easing themselves from those troubles and sorrows, and pains they are under. Now as man naturally and necessarily desires to be happy; when he reflects, he finds he cannot be happy alone: so far from that, that men would be very miserable if they were not to enjoy the society of each other. And however the minds of some, from a misguided zeal, think there is a great pleasure in being intirely alone, as those who have chosen solitude under a pretence of devotion; if they have fancied themselves happy thereby, this is to be accounted for only from the wrong judgment they make, and from a distemper of their imagination. It is certain man is made for society, and therefore cannot be easy without having conversation with his fellow-creatures. However 'tis plain, that man is conscious to himself that he has not a fund of happiness in himself; and therefore he seeks it not only among his fellow-creatures, of the same rank and order, but among those who are very much below him. The generality of mankind
take

take this course: many are saying, as the psalmist speaks, *Who will shew us any good* ^k? Every one is seeking after something that will render him more easy and happy; and deliver him from the misery under which he groans, or from the dangers he fears. Men seek their happiness in such objects as are agreeable to their passions now they are corrupted and depraved: and therefore the generality of mankind *seek the living among the dead* ^l; seek happiness where 'tis not to be found; seek it in gratifying their sensual appetites, which are rendred so sensual by the depravation of their souls thro' sin: they seek things which are unworthy of them, and below the dignity of rational creatures to seek as a happiness. For the enjoyment of happiness they not only *use the things of this world*, which it is lawful to do; *but they abuse them*, by setting their affections upon them after such a manner, and loving them so as they should love God; they seem to love them *with all their heart, and soul, and mind, and strength*.

The love of desire therefore, is indeed an effect of the love we bear to ourselves. When we desire our own happiness, and find that we are not capable of rendring ourselves happy; then we seek to other objects. Men seek to other objects; which they think are capable of rendring them more happy than

they are : and whatsoever those objects are, as there is variety of them by which men seek to be happy, and gratify their passions according to their constitution, or the prejudices which have been conveyed to them by others ; so they place their love.

Now this love of desire is, in the highest degree, and above all other objects, due unto God. The prophet shewed his wisdom in placing it here : *With my soul have I desired thee in the night, and with my spirit within me will I seek thee early* ^m. So likewise the psalmist : *As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God* ⁿ. Many other expressions we find in scripture which shew, in the wisest and best of men, an earnest desire after God. It is the same with *hungering and thirsting after righteousness* ^o. To desire him, is to desire communion with him, that we may receive from him all those blessings and advantages which shall make us truly happy.

This arises, I say, from the love we bear to ourselves : this love of desire, by which we are rendred so earnest and zealous, and importunate in our addresses to God that we may enjoy his favour, arises properly from the love we bear ourselves ; because *in his favour is happiness*. It is a true and a religious love, tho it arises from a love we bear to ourselves ; because 'tis proper that

^m Isa. 26. 9.

ⁿ Psal. 42. 1.

| ^o Mat. 5. 6.

we should reason well and justly : and 'tis to reason rightly, for us to conceive that we ourselves have not a fund of happiness in our own souls. Is it not right reasoning, that the creatures can't furnish us with happiness, but that this must consist in our enjoyment of God ; and that he is the fountain of happiness to us? *There be many that say, Who will shew us any good?* but, says the psalmist, *Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me. Thou hast put gladness in mine heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased* ^p. All are desiring happiness : some place it in the things of this world, as corn and wine, in temporal prosperity, in riches, honours, and pleasures : but these can't satisfy the soul ; they are not proper objects for our love of desire. We may have such a regard for them as God has seen fit to allow ; but we must not place our hearts upon these things. We must *set our affections upon things above* ^q, upon God himself : he is the proper object of the love of desire ; for he alone can satisfy our souls, and render us truly and completely happy. But,

2. There is another kind of love ; or love is modified after another manner, and so may be termed a *love of complacency*. As a love of desire is that which supposes our indigence and emptiness, and puts us upon

^p *Psalm*. 4. 8, 7.

| ^q *Col.* 3. 2.

seeking after such objects as may satisfy this affection; so the love of complacency is, when those objects are enjoyed. The pleasure which a covetous man takes in his heaps of money, the pleasure an ambitious man takes in the honours he has acquired, or a voluptuous man in his sensual gratifications, at the moment he enjoys them, may be termed a love of complacency. He takes a great deal of delight in them, supposing he shall enjoy yet more. For, *he that loveth silver, shall not be satisfied with silver*^r; as the wise man observes. But whatsoever satisfaction men take, whatsoever pleasure they have in the enjoyment of these things, still this engages their hearts to love these objects from which they receive this pleasure, and from which they hope for more. This is called a love of complacency.

Now when we are required *to love God*, it is with this kind of love; that as we should desire him, from the sense of our own emptiness, that he may be our portion and our happiness, who alone is capable of rendering us blessed; so we should take the highest delight in the sense of his favour. And surely to enjoy the favour of God, and the light of his countenance, to conceive ourselves the objects of his loving kindness; this gives a great pleasure and delight to the soul, and far surpasses whatsoever this world can afford: as the psalmist says, in the place

^r Eccl. 5. 10.

already cited, *Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and wine increased.* The love of desire respects the object beloved as absent; the love of complacency has regard to it as being present and enjoyed. And so God is spoken of, as *taking delight* in his people ^f, and *resting in his love* towards them ^s; that is, taking complacency in them: tho they are not capable of furnishing any new pleasures to him who is infinitely satisfied with his own perfections; yet he has that regard to them, and that favour for them, as one friend has for another when he takes a pleasure in his conversation.

3. Another kind of love which we owe to God, is *a love of gratitude.* We find ourselves disposed to love them who love us, and have shewn it by what they have bestowed upon us: and all mankind are agreed 'tis a heinous crime to be guilty of ingratitude, and not make returns of love to those who have expressed theirs to us after any eminent manner, by the benefits and favours they have bestowed upon us. As to a love of desire, it regards the object beloved, as I said before, as not yet enjoyed; and the love of complacency looks upon itself as enjoying it: so the love of gratitude looks back upon its object as having enjoyed it, and thereby received satisfaction in some degree or other. 'Tis very just and reasonable amongst men,

^f Prov. 11. 20.

^s Zeph. 3: 17.

that there should be grateful returns made to benefactors ; how much more then does this love of gratitude belong to God, to whom we owe all we do enjoy, and all that we can hope for, towards making us truly happy ? This love of gratitude particularly regards that favour which he has been already pleased to exhibit to us. *I love the Lord*, says the psalmist, *because he hath heard my voice, and my supplications*¹. *O love the Lord, all ye his saints ; for the Lord preserveth the faithful*². He excites men to love God on account of the benefits they have received at his hand. Nothing can be more just and reasonable than this ; nothing more natural, than that love should produce love : and *herein is love ; not that we loved God, but that he loved us*. This is the love of gratitude, which is excited and moved by the sense of the divine favour and love. And who is capable of enumerating to how great a degree this love of gratitude may arise ? Unless we could reckon up all the benefits and favours which God has bestowed upon us, and all the circumstances which enhance these blessings, and all the provocations which have rendred us unfit objects to have these favours bestowed upon us ; we must necessarily fall short. But,

¹ Psal. 116. 1.

² Psal. 31. 23.

4. There is another kind of love likewise, or another modification of the same love in the souls of men ; and that is, *a love of esteem*, which appears more disinterested than the other. For the love of desire is founded upon ourselves, and our own desire of happiness ; the love of complacency likewise results from this ; the love of gratitude appears more generous, for this is a return to the favours we have received ; yet with this love of gratitude may be mixed a regard to what we may farther enjoy from the same being who has been the author of our happiness already : but the love of esteem, considered abstractedly, regards not properly our own happiness, as the other does, but regards the object itself, the perfections which are in that object, and the amiableness of those perfections. Thus we may suppose those angels, who are *ministring spirits, sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation*^w, to love mankind : not that they are capable of bestowing favours upon them, not that they can expect happiness from creatures so much below them, especially in our present state ; but if they love mankind, as we may suppose they do, from the benignity of their natures ; if they have an esteem for us, it is for what they see valuable in us, either considered as the product of the hand of God in the course of nature, or as refined and reformed by grace. Men love creatures of an

^w Heb. i. 14.

inferior rank to themselves, as they see there are certain qualities in them which are desirable. Men love those whom they have never known personally, and whom they are never like to see, when they have heard of the fame of their wisdom and knowledge, and piety, and other virtues. And after this manner we bear a love to those who have lived many ages before us, from the extraordinary characters they have had in the world, tho we never received any favour from them, or can ever expect any, and so can't love them with a love of desire, or complacency, or gratitude; yet we may love them with a love of esteem. Thus we may love the patriarchs and prophets, and apostles of our Lord and Saviour; and thus we may love the great men in all ages, of whose characters we read.

And after this manner we are *to love God* especially; for in him do meet all perfections whatsoever. To love him with a love of esteem, is to love him because he is lovely in himself, without considering what favours are derived to us. This is the true foundation of love; for what can be more just than to love what is lovely, and to love it in proportion to its loveliness? Now if God be holy, just, and good, and true, and his moral perfections are more amiable than his natural perfections, such as omniscience, and omnipotence, and the like; if he be an infinitely perfect being, and be so lovely; then

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as his perfections are infinite, he must be infinitely loved : however, he must be loved with the utmost force of our affections ; *with all our hearts, and with all our souls, and with all our minds, and with all our strength.* Whatsoever good qualities there are in creatures, which we sometimes call perfections, whatsoever virtues there are, whatsoever is improved by grace, beyond what could be otherwise done in the souls of men ; these things are lovely, these things have charms which attract the love of those who consider things in their own nature : and even vicious men have been constrained sometimes to speak in favour of inward and real goodness, the lustre and glory of it has been so great. How much more does it become us to love God, who has all perfections in himself, and after such a manner as is infinite and absolute ; so that 'tis impossible for us fully to comprehend any one of them ? However, the lustre and glory from the general idea we have of the divine perfections, call for our love after this manner. And this love is so much the more noble and generous, because it terminates on God himself upon the account of his being lovely ; it takes its rise from his perfections, and so terminates in him as being naturally lovely in himself, without considering his being our great benefactor, and the obligations we are under to him.

5. Another manner of love there is, which is called *a love of good-will*. This amongst men is that by which we wish and desire the happiness of another, and are prompted to do what we can to promote it; and in proportion to the intenseness of our good-will to our fellow-creatures, so we excel the more in acts of charity. Those persons who are very superior to others, wish well to their inferiors: they desire that others in pain and adversity may be easy and happy. Now this love is eminent in God towards us; especially in the great gift of his Son, when he sent him into the world to die for our sins. Then the angels celebrated the praises of God's good-will: *Glory be to God in the highest, peace on earth, and good-will towards men*^x. And, *God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*^y. But it may be supposed that this kind of love, the love of good-will, is not the love we owe to God; because he has all perfection in his nature, is self-sufficient, and therefore does not need any of our good acts. *Our goodness extends not to him*^z: our good-will may extend itself to creatures who are indigent; but God is infinitely happy in himself.

'Tis very true, that on this account the perfection of the divine Being is above being

^x Luke 2. 14.

^y John 3. 16.

^z Psal. 16. 2.

capable of our love of good-will in that sense. But yet there is a limited sense in which the love of good-will may appear to be owing to God. If he be infinitely happy in himself, yet we may wish that his infinite perfections may be displayed amongst his creatures: and tho he is infinitely glorious in himself, that he may be actually more glorified in the world. And this is a love which is called *zeal*; that regard which we have to the publishing of God's praise, and the diffusing his honour in the world, that many creatures may be engaged to glorify him. The psalmist does not only call upon *his soul*, and *all that is within him to bless God*^a; but calls upon the whole creation to celebrate his praise, according to the capacity of the several creatures^b. And as God is considered in relation to his church, and so is one with his people, that *in all their afflictions he is afflicted*, and *whatsoever is done for the relief of them, is taken as done to himself, and shall not lose its reward*, as our blessed Saviour declares^c; so this love of good-will, tho God is infinitely exalted above it, yet may be bestowed upon those who are dear to him, and so related that he takes it as done to himself. 'Tis true, this will fall under the notion of love to men: yet this notion of love to men is founded upon the principle of love to God; and when our love to our fellow-creatures

^a Psal. 103. 1.^b Ver. 21, 22.^c Mat. 10. 42.

proceeds from a regard to God, this may be interpreted as a love of good-will towards him, tho he is above all necessity and indigence, and is infinitely satisfied in his own perfections.

Thus have I explained to you after what manner we are to love God. We are to desire him as being alone capable of making us happy, as being the fountain of good, and of true and solid happiness. We are to take complacency and delight in the enjoyment of him, when we have communion with him in any of his sacred appointments; when we receive the tokens of his favour, and when we offer our solemn services to him: when we take delight in these, this is loving God with a love of complacency. We are to love him with a love of gratitude, on account of his favours; and we are to strive that our gratitude may be in proportion to the greatness and number of the divine blessings: tho after all the grateful efforts which we make, we fall infinitely short of what God deserves at our hands. We are to love him with a love of esteem, on the account of the infinitely lovely perfections of his divine nature, who is *exalted above all blessing and praise*^d, and above all the powers of love, either in men or angels: however, as he is infinitely lovely, he is to be loved with all our powers and faculties. We are, moreover, to love him with a love of good-will,

^d Neh. 9. 5.

so far as he is capable of receiving that kind of love : so as to desire the advancement of his glory and truth among men, and that his name and perfections may be displayed in the world ; and so as may dispose us to shew to those who are nearly allied to him, the kindness which he requires at our hands, because they are the objects of this love of good-will, and 'tis taken as shewn to God himself.

II. The second thing proposed, was *the extent and vehemence* of this love. We are *to love God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind, and with all our strength* : which words express both the *extent and intenseness* of this love. And here I should shew you, that to love God *with all our heart and mind, with all our soul and strength*, without a nice determination what each of these expressions peculiarly signify, does at least comprehend in it that we should love him with all the powers and faculties he has given us, both of body and mind : that all our affections, all the passions of our souls, should be under the influence and conduct of divine love : that our thoughts, our understandings, our reason and judgment, should be exercised in doing those things which are agreeable to God, and whereby we may express our love to him : that the bent of our souls should be towards him : that the faculty of speech, and our
external

external actions, should be employed to the same purpose to glorify him, from the same principle of love to him: that we should use the estate he gives us, the reputation we have in the world, the talents which are agreeable amongst men, to influence them to love him, and to express thereby our love to God: that we should use the opportunities and means which his providence furnishes us with, for this purpose: and that our love should rise to the highest degree possible: that we should aspire to love him more and more: that we should be uniform, and persevering in our love to him, and not content ourselves with some sudden fits and starts of devotion, but be regular and constant in loving God: that this should be the principle of all our actions. And farther, that we should love him after a manner superior to any love we bestow upon any of his creatures: that the love we pay to his creatures, should be in subordination to the love we owe him, and should be regulated by our love to him, which is the principle of all true religion: that we should love others with a reference unto God, with reference to his will and to his glory; to his will as the rule, and his glory as the end of the motions of our souls.

III. The third and last thing would have been to shew you, *the dignity and importance* of this command of loving God after such a

manner. This is expressed by its being called *the first, or the greatest commandment*. And here I should have shewn you, it may be called *first* in regard of the order of nature; and likewise *first*, that is, chief or principal, in regard of its dignity, when compared with other precepts. The importance of this duty would likewise appear, in that love to God is to regulate all the rest of our affections. Whom we love we shall fear to offend; we shall mourn when he is displeased, or when we do any thing unbecoming us, and contrary to the respect we owe him. Love to God will raise in our minds a holy indignation against sin; and, as conscious of our guilt, will make us *abhor ourselves, and repent in dust and ashes*^c. Love will inspire us with hope in his goodness and mercy: love will govern all the passions of our minds: love will dispose our thoughts to project things which tend to his glory, such as may appear to be genuine expressions of our affection to him. Love to God is to regulate our love to ourselves: we must not so love ourselves, our ease and pleasure, our honour and reputation in the world; we must not so love our lives themselves as to do any thing that is contrary to the love we owe to God: and in proportion to the degree of our love to God, are our duties discharged on our part, and accepted on his. Our prayer is so much the more acceptable to God, by

^c Job 42. 6.

how much the more we love him ; and so the rest of our religious services. And in regard of our duties to men, when we are just and charitable, when we are performing the particular duties which belong to the civil life ; by how much the more we love God, and by how much the more this principle influences us in these duties, so much the more are they acceptable to him.

But these things would require a more particular consideration than our present limits will allow. I shall therefore conclude with making a reflection or two upon what has been said.

1. We see already by the account which has been given concerning the love we owe to God, that it is a very extensive duty. And if it be so, how much does it concern us to examine ourselves upon this account; and see whether we love God after this manner? whether we desire him so that we can say; *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee*^f. Whether we take such delight and complacency in him, as to account this world *as dung and dross* in comparison of him? and that our *affections* are so placed *upon things above*^g, as to despise things below? Whether we stir up our souls with a love of gratitude, as the psalmist did; *Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his*

^f Psal. 73: 25.

1 ^g Phil. 3. 8.

holy name^h, &c. Whether we can say, *O what shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits*ⁱ? and are uneasy in our minds because we can't make so large returns of gratitude as we think he deserves at our hands? Whether we have that esteem of the divine perfections which we ought to have? and whether we love him as he is infinitely just and holy, as well as because he is infinitely merciful? Whether our love to him kindles a zeal in our breasts to promote his glory and honour; and, as much as in us lies, to display it in the world? Whether we are always willing and ready to shew our love to him by our affectionate regard to his people? Let us thus examine ourselves: and certainly it can be no difficult matter to know whether we truly love God, if we thus look into ourselves. As to this world, we can tell what objects we love, whose company is agreeable to us: we can tell whom we love with a love of friendship; what worldly objects our souls most desire and pursue; upon what our thoughts principally turn. And certainly if we love God after an intense manner, *with all our heart and soul, with all our mind and strength*, we must needs know it: certainly we can tell whither the powers of our souls tend, and whether we love him after such a manner as has been explained. If we do; then this, as it is *the first and great commandment*, will govern us in the

^h Psal. 103. 1.

course of our lives. And as we should examine ourselves upon this, so this shews us,

2. The excellency and perfection of our holy religion. For if this be the great commandment, and all religion centers in this; then 'tis easy to be demonstrated that our religion is the best and truest scheme that can be in the world: because nothing can be more evident, than that a being who is infinitely lovely, should be loved after such a manner. No religion so consistent as that which makes this the prime and the great commandment, and to govern the rest. And especially are we engaged hereunto now under the gospel; because the more God has displayed his love to us, the stronger are the motives, and the clearer the demonstration how much we ought to love him. *If any man love not our Lord Jesus*, says the apostle, *let him be Anathema, Maranatha*^k. He devotes him to a bitter curse, if, under the dispensation of the gospel, he does not love his blessed Saviour, who has so signalized his love to us, in that *he has laid down his life for our sakes*. And tho this love to God is a duty prescribed to us in the divine law, and so a part of natural religion; yet is it *a duty* more especially incumbent on us under the dispensation of the gospel, as it is enforced by stronger motives: for, *God having manifested his love to fallen man by the gift of his Son*, the stronger obligation lies

^k 1 Cor. 16. 22.

upon us, to love him who has so loved us, as
to wash us from our sins in his own blood, and
make us kings and priests to God, that we
may reign with him for ever and ever ¹.

¹ Rev. i. 5, 6.





SERMON XV.

The unchangeable duration of
the MORAL LAW con-
sidered.

MATT. V. 18.

*For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and
earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in
no wise pass from the law, till all be
fulfilled.*



IN this, and the two following
chapters, we have the sermon
which our Saviour delivered up-
on the mount. Being baptized,
he entred upon his publick mi-
nisty, and the execution of his prophe-
tical office; which he discharged in every
respect as became him. And being to in-
troduce a new religion; new, I say, in some
sort, tho it was founded upon what had been
declared heretofore; he begins as became
one who would excite the attention of the
people to what he had to deliver. As men
naturally

naturally aspire after blessedness, and the great question is, *Who will shew us any good* ^m? especially, who will shew us the supreme good, the chief end and happiness of man; so our Lord begins his discourse with pronouncing blessings upon those who would be truly virtuous and religious: and indeed this is the character the apostles give of him; they say, *God sent his Son Jesus to bless us* ⁿ. He pronounces blessedness upon the *humble*, the *meek*, those who *aspire after purity of heart and mind*, the *sincere*, the *merciful*, those who are *charitable*, and willing to *make peace* in the world, those who *hunger after righteousness*, and those who *suffer for righteousness-sake* ^o: and after having shewn the necessary connection between holiness and happiness, he addresses himself to such as would be willing to be his disciples, by pressing them to put in practice the duties which he had recommended, and to which he had promised so great blessings; that so they might appear as *the salt of the earth*, as *the light of the world*, and *shine before men by their good works*, so that their heavenly Father might be glorified ^p. Our Lord having recommended these virtues and the practice of them, had a fair occasion to let the Scribes and Pharisees, who were very captious, and ready to criticise upon his doctrine, know

^m Psal. 4. 6.ⁿ Acts 3. 26.^o Ver. 1—12.^p Ver. —16.

that he did not come to overturn the religion which God had established in the world; that he did not come to destroy morality, and to introduce a new scheme and system as to the sum and substance thereof; but to confirm that which was most material, and of the greatest consequence under the former dispensation. Therefore says he, in the 17th verse, *Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.* Then follow the words of our text: *Verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.* q. d. "Do not imagine that I am
 " come to abolish the law, and the prophets, to destroy and nullify them: I am
 " not come to destroy, but to fulfil them;
 " to obey this law, and recommend obedience to it, as that which is necessary, if
 " men will aspire after happiness in such a
 " way as to attain it. For this law, of which
 " I am speaking, as if our Saviour should
 " say, is so firm and durable, that heaven
 " and earth shall pass away, before one jot
 " or tittle of that shall fail, or pass away;
 " for it must be all fulfilled."

These words give us occasion to consider,

I. What is here precisely signified by *the law*; the duration of which Christ affirms by so very express terms.

II. The

II. The import of those terms by which the duration of this law, whatever it be, is expressed. And,

III. The reasons of the duration of it.

I. What is here signified by *the law*.

The law here spoken of, must be some law which was known to the Jews : for our Saviour is now preaching amongst them, and speaks of it to them as a thing well known, calling it *the law*. It must be a written law ; no oral tradition, but a written law : for our Lord refers in this chapter to several passages of it written in the old testament, and speaks of the duration of *every jot or tittle of it* ; that is, of every the least part and particle, the least letter or point which related to it : by which it is evident he refers to a written law. Now the written laws which God had given the Jews, are reducible to these three heads ; the *ceremonial*, the *judicial*, and the *moral*. The ceremonial law consisted of various rites and institutions, of divers sacrifices, washings, and purifications, and other ordinances which are called *carnal commandments* ^a, and were designed indeed to continue for a season, *till the time of the reformation*, till the time of the gospel ; but then it was to expire, and give way to an institution which was more glorious. The judicial law consisted of precepts calculated for the people and nation of the Jews, and adjusted to

^a Heb. 9. 10.

their division into tribes, to their settlement in the land of Canaan, and the circumstances of their political and civil state, as they were a people whose government God himself was pleased to form and model for them : and these judicial laws, so far as they depend upon the moral law, and are necessarily deduced from thence, regard other nations as well as them. As for the moral law, which is calculated for persons under all dispensations, this is the most common notion of it : that which is perpetual, and regards not only the church of God under one dispensation but under others, and arises and results from that relation wherein we stand to God and to one another ; and so consists of two tables, which God was pleased to give to the Israelites in the wilderness : for he then revived the moral law, when he gave them two tables of stone inscribed with those laws which regarded their duty both towards God and towards men. Now the law in our text must either respect all these three sorts of laws, or some one or two of them.

It does not seem probable that it should respect them all ; because our Saviour declares, that it is not the design of his coming to dissolve or abolish this law, of which he is here speaking, whatever it be ; and because he elsewhere so strictly prohibits the dissolving or breaking any precept of it. And if we consider particularly the ceremonial law, and the judicial law, so far as
it

it respected the Jewish polity particularly; we shall find it very hard to fix this sense to either of them; that our Lord should affirm he did not come to dissolve the ceremonial, or the judicial law, when he said, *Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets; or to dissolve*, as the word might be rendred more properly ^t. It will be hard to prove that our Lord said concerning either of these, *I am not come to dissolve, but to fulfil* ^t; for *verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle of the law shall in no wise fail, till all be fulfilled*.

For it is evident, that Christ did come to dissolve the ceremonial law: he came *by one offering to perfect for ever them that are sanctified* ^s. And the author of the epistle to the Hebrews sufficiently shews that the perfection of that offering put an end to all the rest: they were repeated till this perfect offering came; but when this was presented, then that text was fulfilled, *Sacrifice and offerings thou wouldst not* ^t. The apostle to the Hebrews declares that *there was a change of the priesthood*, of the priesthood of Aaron to that of Christ, which is of *the order of Melchizedek*; and he infers from thence *a change of the law* ^u. He declares that that law was abrogated, or *disannulled*, *for the weakness and unprofitableness of it* ^v: it was therefore called *carnal*, and consisted

^r καταλῦσαι.

^s Mat. 5. 17.

^t Heb. 10. 14.

^t Heb. 10. 8. Psal. 40. 6.

^u Heb. 7. 12.

^v Ver. 18.

in temporal things. So that it is plain Christ did come to dissolve the ceremonial law: he *blotted out the hand-writing of ordinances*, as the apostle tells us in the 2d to the Colossians, *ver. 14. and nailed it to his cross*; those ordinances *which were against us*. It were very easy to prove this from a great many texts of scripture: but it shall suffice to add, that our Saviour himself declares this, that he came to put an end to the ceremonial law. For it was necessary, by the ceremonial law, that persons should come to the public worship of God at Jerusalem, whether Jews or Gentiles: they were to fly to that house of God, and there to serve him. But our Lord said to the woman of Samaria; *The hour cometh, and now is, when neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, ye shall worship the Father; but the true worshipers shall worship him in spirit and in truth*^w. Not in Jerusalem, or in this mountain, says he: *but wherever God shall be worshiped in spirit and in truth*, there shall be his temple; he will accept of that service. So that our Saviour did come to dissolve the ceremonial law.

Moreover, in the verse foregoing our text, our Lord is speaking of *the law and the prophets* together. Now the prophets work was partly to predict things to come concerning the kingdom of the Messiah; and partly to reprove the people for their sins, and awaken

^w John 4. 21, 23.

them to repentance. It is true indeed, that Christ did not come to dissolve the prophecies in any respect, but to fulfil and accomplish them. But here *prophets* seem to signify that part of their prophecies which regards the law as commenting upon it. So elsewhere our Saviour expresses himself, when he speaks of *the law and the prophets*: *Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets* *. That is, this moral duty is a very summary one; which contains the substance of the laws delivered in the holy scripture, and the comments of the prophets upon them. And so in another place: *Jesus says*, to one of the Pharisees, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind: this is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets* †. Which is as much as to say, all moral duties depend upon these two great commandments, of loving God and our neighbour. So that in this passage *the law and the prophets* signify all moral duties; the doing to others as we would have others do to us: our Lord signifies that this is a moral point; and in speaking of *the law and the prophets*, speaks of what is frequently recommended by them, the observation of that moral law

* Mat. 7. 12.

† Mat. 22. 37—40.

upon which they frequently comment. And unless *the law and the prophets*, according to the scripture-use of the phrase, can signify the ceremonial law, it seems not fair to make that interpretation of it here. But it is plain *the law and the prophets* signify the moral law, because that is distinguished as *the law* by way of eminency. We shall see farther how our Lord interprets the law in this sermon; and that that law, so many parts and passages of which he is explaining in the sequel of his discourse, must be the law which is spoken of in the words of our text. Now Christ is not here explaining the ceremonial law: therefore it cannot probably be that.

In the words immediately after our text, he forbids men to teach or practise any thing that might look like the violation of this law of which he is speaking: *Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven*². Now it is not likely that our Lord speaks here of the ceremonial law, when it is certain that the apostles did teach the abrogation of the ceremonial law, and yet were counted *the greatest in the kingdom of heaven*². The kingdom of heaven sig-

² Mat. 5. 19.

1 ² Chap. 11. 11.

nifies the evangelic state, whether of grace or glory: and that seems to make appear what this law is. It is a law which belongs to *the kingdom of heaven*, to the state of the gospel: which the ceremonial law could not do, and therefore expired upon the introduction of a better ministration. It is a law, as appears by the words of our text, which is to continue *as long as heaven and earth*; whereas the ceremonial law was soon to expire. About three years after our Saviour preached this doctrine, that was to expire, and to be nailed to his cross: and was it likely that he should speak of the continuance of that as long as heaven and earth, which was so soon to be at an end? So that I think these words cannot justly be applied to the ceremonial law.

If it be said that the ceremonial law did not pass *till it was fulfilled*, and that it was fulfilled by Christ, in as much as by his sufferings he appeared to be the substance of those shadows; I answer, our Saviour is not speaking here of *fulfilling the law* by way of antitype, but of fulfilling the law by way of obedience to it: therefore he censures so much those men who should *break the least of those commandments*, or should teach the breach of them to others. Now tho our Lord fulfilled the ceremonial law as the antitype; yet he taught, and his disciples after him, that it was to expire and come to an end, and that it must therefore
be

be broken. And to this purpose you may see the 5th chapter of John, ver. 18. where this word, as well as in some other places, is used: *Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he had not only broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father; making himself equal with God.* I only cite the text for the word *broken*, as being the same word which is used in our text and context ^b, either the primitive or derivative, which is much the same thing. Now *to break the sabbath*, is to act contrary to that law. So here our Lord is speaking of acting contrary to that law by breaking a precept. And it is certain the ceremonial law was to be broken this way. After the death of Christ, that was to expire as to its efficacy; and therefore it could be no longer obliging. Again: John 7. 23. *If a man on the sabbath-day receive circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken* ^c; *are ye angry at me, because I have made a man every whit whole on the sabbath-day?* When persons were circumcised, that law of Moses was not broken but kept: therefore if this be the same word with that in our text and context, we cannot suppose our Saviour intends that the ceremonial law should not be broken; that is, that circumcision, and other ceremonies, should not be omitted. For this was taught by his disciples, and was necessa-

^b ἔλυε τὸ σάββατον.

| ^c μὴ λυθῇ ὁ νόμος.

rily consequent upon his death. So that *fulfilling*, in our text, is in opposition to *breaking*. Now it was lawful to act contrary to the ceremonial law, when once the obligation ceased: therefore that was spoken of as abolished. See one passage more for this word, because it tends much to clear the sense of the text: John 10. 35. *If he called them gods to whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken*^d; that is, cannot be dissolved, cannot be vacated, cannot be made of none effect. And yet the ceremonial law was thus dissolved and vacated, and made of none effect. So that I think it is plain, from the whole context, that the ceremonial law is not that which our Lord says he came *not to destroy* or to dissolve; because he did come indeed that it might be vacated and abrogated.

As for the judicial law, so far as it regarded the polity of the Jews, Christ did come to put an end to that: for he came to *break down the partition-wall between Jews and Gentiles*; and to *abolish the enmity*, as the apostle speaks to the Ephesians^e. The law was to go forth from Sion^f, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem^g, into the several parts of the world; and not in Jerusalem only, or in the mount of Samaria^h, but wherever God was *worshiped in spirit and*

^d ἡ σὺνταξις τοῦ θεοῦ.

^e Eph. 2. 14, 15, 16.

^f Isa. 2. 3.

^g Mic. 4. 2.

^h John 4. 21, 22, 23.

in truth, that worship was to be accepted by him. And as *he came to his own; and his own received him not*ⁱ; we know the consequence of their obstinacy was the destruction of their city and temple, and the dissipation of that people thro'out the several parts of the world. So that Christ could not say he came *not to destroy* the Jewish law so far as it regarded their peculiar polity, and so far as it regarded the ceremonial law.

It remains therefore that it must be the moral law, as written and contain'd in the two tables, which our Saviour refers to in saying, *one jot or one tittle shall not pass away*. This is that law, of which he mentions various passages in this chapter. It appears, I say, to be the law of the decalogue, all the laws of the decalogue.

1. Because this is agreeable to what our Lord speaks before concerning the blessedness of those who should perform such virtues and duties as it requires. It is the moral law: that law which requires *poverty of spirit, and humility*; which requires *meekness*, and an earnest *desire after righteousness*; which requires *purity of heart*, or sincerity, and spiritual-mindedness: that law which the apostle speaks of as *holy, just and good*^k. It is the moral law which requires *mercy*,

ⁱ John 1. 11.

|| Rom. 7. 12.

and *charity*, and *the love of peace*. All these are moral virtues, upon which Christ pronounces so many blessings: and therefore it is but reasonable that we should interpret *the law* he here speaks of, to be the moral law.

2. This appears in that our Lord is recommending to his disciples such a law as should *make their good works shine before men*¹. Now the works of the ceremonial rites, whatever satisfaction some men might take in them, and however for the time being they might be agreeable to the will of God; yet these do not make *our light shine before men* as our moral virtues do. *Let your light so shine before men, that they seeing your good works, may glorify your Father which is in heaven.* *Men* signifies the Gentiles as well as the Jews; and the Jews could not recommend their conversation to the Gentiles, to the men of the world, except in the practice of moral duties: therefore there must be regard had to that in these words. Besides, this is that law which the prophets especially recommend, while they often speak very low of the ceremonial performances. Thus Isaiah both begins and ends his prophecy: *To what purpose is the multitude of your oblations*^m? *He that killeth an ox, is as he that killeth a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as he that cutteth off a dog's*

¹ Mat. 5. 16.— ^m Isa. 1. 11.

neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swines blood; and he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idolⁿ: that is, while the people remained impure and immoral in their hearts and lives, their external rites and ceremonies would do them little service. In the 50th Psalm there is a very remarkable passage to this purpose; which shews that the prophets had no great occasion to reprove them for the breach of the ceremonial laws, for they were often very nice and punctual in the performance of them, but very remiss in moral duties. Ver. 8. *I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices, or thy burnt-offerings, to have been continually before me.* Ver. 9. *I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he-goats out of thy folds.* Ver. 10. *For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills, &c.* What follows? Ver. 14. *Offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay thy vows unto the Most High.* “Perform moral duties: I “do not reprove thee for want of sacrifices, “but I reprove thee because thou hast been “immoral; thou hast not served me with “piety, sincerity, and integrity.” And thus they are often also reprov’d for their injustice and cruelty. And the Lord, by the mouth of the prophet Isaiah, calls *that the fast he hath chosen; to loose the bands of wicked-*

ⁿ Isa. 66. 3.

ness, to unbind the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free; to deal their bread to the hungry, and when they saw the naked, to cover them^o. To the same purpose the prophet Micah speaks: *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the most high God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? &c.* No: He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God^p? These are the main things which are to be performed: and it was thus on the moral law that the prophets chiefly commented. Again,

3. In the words following the text, our Saviour takes occasion, when he had shewn the duration of the law, to declare unto those who heard him, that *unless their righteousness did exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees, they should in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven*^q. Now can any one imagine that our Lord intends by this to recommend an obedience to the ceremonial law? It is very evident that the Scribes and Pharisees were much more punctual in observing that than the moral law. They

^o Isa. 58. 6, 7.

^p Micah 6. 6, 7, 8.

^q Mat. 5. 20.

even tithed *mint, anise, and cummin*, but they neglected the weightier matters of the law, *judgment, mercy, and faith*^r. So that Christ is here recommending such a *righteousness*, such a conformity to the law of God, as exceeded that of the Scribes and Pharisees; that is, exceeded ceremonial performances, and rendred men strict in observing the laws of the decalogue.

4. It farther appears, from the sequel of our Lord's discourse, that it was this law he had in view. For he mentions several particular precepts of it; he mentions that law which forbids to *kill*^r; and shews how extensive it is in its obligation. He mentions that which forbids *adultery*^s; and that which forbids the *taking of the name of God in vain*^t; and that which forbids *covetousness*, &c. So that it is plain it is the law of the ten precepts which he is speaking of; because he instances in divers of them, and shews how strictly and purely they ought to be observed. It is true, our Saviour mentions sacrifice afterwards; but he mentions it only occasionally: therefore it cannot from thence be concluded that he intends to recommend the ceremonial law. He is speaking in that place of charity, and love to our brethren; shewing what care we ought to take not to foster malice in our

^r Mat. 23. 23.

^s Chap. 5. 21.

^t Ver. 27.

^t Ver. 33.

minds,

minds, nor suffer that leaven to sour our souls. To this purpose he informs his hearers, that *when they had a sacrifice to offer, they should be first reconciled, if they knew their brother had ought against them.* Love and charity it seems was of the greatest importance, and without it no sacrifice could be acceptable. So that the tenor of Christ's discourse is to recommend moral duties; and he draws several particular instances out of the law of the ten precepts: therefore I think it is plain he had regard, in our text, to the moral law.

And this is *the law* indeed by way of eminency. This is the perfect and the durable law. And therefore in the 19th and 119th Psalm this law is so highly recommended, and is spoken of as it were the only law: *The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul*^a. Now as for the ceremonial law; that in the scripture is represented as imperfect, and only to obtain till a more perfect dispensation came. Thus the moral law is called *spiritual*^v, and the other is called *carnal*^w. The moral law is said to be *holy, spiritual, just and good*; while the law of ceremonies is represented as consisting of mere *carnal commandments and ordinances*, which appertain to *the purifying of the flesh*. The moral law, I say, is the

^a Psal. 19. 17.^v Rom. 7. 14.^w Heb. 9. 10.

law by way of eminency : and therefore when the psalmist says, in the 119th Psalm, so many excellent things concerning the law, it must needs, very commonly at least, be interpreted of the law of the ten words ; that psalm being calculated to celebrate the perfection and glory of it. I think therefore it hath been sufficiently proved, that *the law* which our Saviour speaks of, is the moral law of God, the moral law which is written. And where is it written, but in the decalogue, the law of the ten commandments ? Divers of which laws in this chapter our Saviour instances in, and explains, and comments upon. I proceed therefore,

II. To consider the import of those terms by which the duration of this law is expressed. And,

I. We are to observe in what manner our Saviour speaks of the duration of it in the words before our text ; which is both negatively and affirmatively. He says, that *he came not to destroy this law*, whatever it be : and, on the other hand, he affirms that *he came to fulfil it* * ; which signifies *to obey*, as you see in Rom. 13. 8. *Owe no man any thing but to love one another ; for he that loveth another, hath fulfilled the law* ; that is, hath obeyed the law, hath done what the law requires. So Gal. 5. 14. *For all the*

* Mat. 5. 17.

law, says the apostle, *is fulfilled in one word, even in this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* The apostle is there speaking of the same moral law which he says is fulfilled, or obeyed in this, in *loving our neighbour.* So in James 2. 8 — 11. *If ye fulfil the royal law, according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well. But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. So that to fulfil the law, is to obey the law. And the apostle shews it must be obeyed in all its points, because he who offends in one point, virtually breaks the rest; for by the same rule he might take the liberty to break others.*

2. We are to observe in what strong terms our Saviour expresses the duration of the law in the words of our text. He introduces them with a strong asseveration; *Verily I say unto you:* a manner of speaking which our Lord frequently makes use of, when he speaks of matters of the greatest importance; or when he would extremely engage the attention of his hearers: so here he solemnly affirms, that *till heaven and earth*

pass, not one jot or tittle of the law should fail, till all was fulfilled. He specifies the time of the duration of it, and makes it commensurate with the world : *Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or tittle of the law should in no wise fail.* As he thus strongly affirms the duration of the whole law, so he refers what he has said to the several parts of it : and lest it should be thought that some special precepts of the decalogue were to remain, and others were to be dissolved ; he declares, in the words following, that the *least* were not to be *broken* ⁷. And in our text, not only does our Lord declare that one law is not to be broken, dissolv'd, or pass away ; but not one part of any law : nay, he instances in that which is less than a word, a letter, the least letter in the Hebrew alphabet, or a tittle, or a point, or an accent, or a part of a letter, as some render it ; which is a sort of proverbial expression, but fully represents that the law must be intirely preserved, and not any variation made in the decalogue : and this, *till heaven and earth pass away*. Not but that some things of the moral law will remain even after the world is dissolv'd : for our relation to God will make it our duty to love him for ever ; and our relation to our brethren will make it necessary for us to love them

⁷ Mat. 5. 19.

for ever also. But *until*, sometimes does not signify that when that time is come, then the thing shall pass away which is said to continue till then. *Your iniquities shall not be purged away till you die*^z: that is, you shall die in your sins; but they shall not be purged away when you die, they shall never be purged away. It is not supposed at all that they should be purged away after they were dead. So Christ *shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he hath brought judgment unto victory*^a. It does not follow that he shall fail, or be discouraged afterwards; but the meaning is, he shall never fail, but shall bring forth judgment unto victory. So sometimes God speaks of his covenant being *established as the day and night*^b; and that *the mountains should be removed, rather than what he hath said should fail*^c. So that the substance of this expression is, that the heavens and the earth may sooner fail and cease, than the least part of the moral law should lose its obligation. And our Saviour expresses himself to the same purpose in Luke 16. 17. *It is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail*. God may sooner destroy the heavens and the earth, than destroy this law of his: it is established so firmly, that you may sooner expect the dissolution of the world, than that he will re-

^z Isa. 22. 14.^a Isa. 42. 3, 4. Mat. 12. 20.^b Jer. 33. 20.^c Isa. 54. 10.

cede from this law. For the duties of it are so becoming God to command, and man to obey, that God will sooner break the world in pieces than that this law shall be vacated, and made null. So that it is the most forcible expression that can be, to signify the duration of the law thro'out the world. And how contrary to the nature and design of God is it to abrogate such a law? For it is added, *it shall in no wise pass away*. It is not enough for men to say, this and that command shall not quite pass away, there shall something or other be preserved of it, something for substance like it. No: *it shall in no wise pass away*, not *one jot or tittle*, not any part of it, *shall*^d *not, not pass away*, as the word is in the original; shall not in any sense: but it must be fulfilled, it must be obeyed, it must be taught and observed. And this is the kingdom of heaven in the state of the gospel. Those who are the ministers in the kingdom of heaven, that is, under the dispensation of the gospel, are obliged to teach these laws: and *he shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven, who shall break any one of them, and shall teach men so*.

Thus have I shewn in what manner our Lord confirms the duration of the moral law. I proceed,

^d Οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ.

III. To

III. To shew you the reasons of the duration of it. As our Saviour affirms, in very forcible terms, that it must endure, and that it must not be broken, or dissolv'd, but must abide; the reasons of this may be a little briefly considered. And,

I. This law of which Christ speaks, and which he recommends to his disciples, and the continuance or duration of which he declares, is suited and adapted to all dispensations. There were some laws adapted to the time of the patriarchs; there were others adapted to the polity of the Jews, and to their church-state or œconomy. There are some laws adapted to the time of the gospel; as baptism, and the Lord's-supper, which were not in practise before. These are called positive institutions: but the law of *the ten words* hath had place under all these dispensations. These had place under the dispensations before the law: and tho God after an extraordinary manner gave the law upon mount Sinai in two tables of stone; yet these were duties incumbent upon men before. This was a new edition of the law; but men were under the same obligations from the beginning: for every one of the duties contain'd in these laws, results from the relation betwixt God and his creatures, or that of the creatures one towards another, or their own condition with regard to them-

themselves. So after our Saviour's ascension into heaven, after the ceremonial law had been accomplished, and was vacated, we find that this law was still recommended. The apostle Paul says, *the law is holy, just, and good* ^e. *Do we make void the law thro' faith?* *God forbid: yea, we establish the law* ^f: which must be this same moral law. And thus the same apostle speaks to Timothy: *The law is good, if a man use it lawfully* ^g. And various passages there are to the same purpose in the writings of the apostles. So that it is plain that this is of force thro'out the various dispensations of the world. It does not refer to the Jews as distinct from Gentiles, but to man as man: does not refer to a dispensation only before the gospel, but under the gospel. And seeing it is suited to all dispensations, it must needs therefore be in force in all dispensations. For a man does not owe another justice or charity more if he be a Jew than if he be a Gentile: nor could this duty be more incumbent upon the Jews than it is upon the Gentiles. If we are related to God, we are under the strongest obligations to worship and serve him according to his own institutions. And tho there may be positive institutions which may vary; yet to worship the true God, and not to take his name in vain, and observe

^e Rom. 7. 12.

^f Chap. 3. 31.

| ^g 1 Tim. 1. 8.

the sabbath, &c. the reason of these are the same from one generation to another. Again,

2. This law of the decalogue is remark'd and characterized by God himself to be a durable law, in that it was given after a peculiar manner. It would be the most unaccountable thing in the world to imagine this of the same nature with the ceremonial law. This was given by God himself, with an audible voice, before 600000 people, besides women and children. It was *written with the finger of God*, after a miraculous manner, *on two tables of stone*: a law, which, as it was written and delivered in this miraculous way, so it was to be kept after a peculiar manner. It is not to be imagin'd that God would have distinguished it thus, if there were not distinguishing characters upon it in regard to its own nature, its usefulness, and design. It is therefore highly reasonable, that we should consider after what manner God hath honour'd it, that we may take peculiar notice of it. Nay, it is moreover, not only established before the gospel, but it acquires glory under the dispensation of the gospel: for the accomplishment of it is recommended to us by greater motives; and holiness and purity, which is the conformity to the law of God, are raised to a greater height under the gospel. So that the gospel is so far from abolishing

abolishing this law, that it improves the minds of men, and renders them more capable of obeying and fulfilling it.

3. We are to consider, that if this law of the decalogue could be dissolved, abolished and vacated, then there had been no need for Christ to die : for if the law could have been dissolved, there had been no need of a mediator to satisfy for our transgressing it. The way would have been to dissolve it, and so sin would have ceased : for, *where there is no law, there is no transgressor*^h ; and where there is no transgressor, there is no sin, there is no punishment, or any need of an atoning sacrifice. And,

4. Nothing can be so injurious to the christian religion, or hurtful to the souls of men, as to pretend that it vacates the moral law : for there is nothing which can render men so great and excellent, and so like to God, as a conformity to his holy law. And if Christ came to take away, or to abolish that law, this must have been to give men a license to commit all manner of sin ; which is the most unbecoming idea of christianity that can be, and ought to be rejected with the greatest abhorrence. Our Saviour *came to fulfil it* by his example, and to answer the sanction of it by his sufferings, and thus to recommend holiness both by his sufferings, and his obedience. He came to

^h Rom. 4. 15.

*purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. And the grace of God that bringeth salvation, teacheth us to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly and righteously, and godly in this present evil world*ⁱ.

Thus have I passed thro' the three things which I propos'd. In the first place I have shewn you, that the law spoken of in our text, is the moral written law contained in the two tables of the ten commandments. In the second place, that of this law our Saviour himself affirms, and it is confirmed from divers testimonies in the scriptures, that every part and particle of it is established; and *heaven and earth may sooner be dissolv'd, than the least part of it should fail* in its obligation upon us; that every part thereof is *to be fulfilled*, that is, obeyed. And, in the third place, I have shewed you the reasons hereof, from the nature of the law itself, and from the extraordinary manner of its exhibition; and from the scope and design of the gospel, and the absurdities which would arise if it should be supposed that the christian religion dissolves it. It remains that I make an inference or two, and conclude.

ⁱ Tit. 2. 12, 14.

1. If it be as you have heard ; then it is certain, that those persons subvert the doctrine of our blessed Saviour who deny their obligation to the moral law, and pretend that Christ hath delivered us from the obligation of it, as some have had the confidence to assert. As if it did not now oblige us in point of duty ; or however, that all the regard we were to have to it, was only to arise from a principle of generosity, so as to make some thankful returns to God for his favours, but not because we are obliged to it. In answer to this absurd notion, no more needs be added to what hath been already said concerning the establishment of the moral law : but however, we may remark the pride and arrogance of these persons, who would fain fancy themselves in such a condition that there is no duty incumbent on them ; as if they might act as they pleased, and yet incur no guilt. And their great folly, as well as arrogance, farther appears, in that since they pretend nothing can be required of them in a way of duty ; consequently, all that they perform is a sort of work of supererogation, more than is required of them. Thus they who pretend to abdicate all sort of merit, seem to seek something or other which may look meritorious : for if they do something more than they are obliged to do, then it may be fairly enough said there is something
of

of merit in what they do. How far is this from the temper which Christ requires in his disciples? who, when they *have done all those things which are commanded them*, are taught to say, *we are unprofitable servants, we have done that which was our duty to do**; and to acknowledge their imperfections in what they have done. But then it is absurd, on the other hand, for them to pretend many things are good, as they are performed from a principle of generosity, but that they are not so in point of duty: for if the obligation of the law was taken away, and so their conformity to it were not a duty; to what purpose should they shew their generosity this way? For if there were no duty, the transgression of the law could be no sin; and if no sin, God could not be displeased with them. And then, if they did something conformable to the law, seeing it was no duty; what thank could they have from man, or what applause from God himself? So that according to their notion, good and evil would be things indifferent. So strangely absurd are men when they abandon this rule which God has laid down in his word; this rule of duty, to which we ought to be conformable under all dispensations.

* Luke 17. 10.

2. This shews how guilty they are who break any part of the moral law, and establish principles which may dispose men to do so; as those of the Romish communion do.

One of these laws forbids idolatry, and commands that we should worship the only true God, and serve him only; and another forbids our worshipping of images. How do these *make void the laws of God by their own traditions*¹, when they multiply to themselves objects to worship, and bow down to graven images, contrary to the express letter of the divine law? These are highly to be reprov'd, in that they act contrary to the express words of our Saviour, who says, that *not one jot or tittle of the law is to pass away*.

Another instance I may give you, in which many others transgress this righteous rule: and that is, in not observing the fourth command according to its precise and literal meaning, but imposing other interpretations upon it, as if at least it were partly vacated and abrogated; when, according to the tenor of the words of Christ in our text, it appears to remain still in its full force. It will not be sufficient for men to say it is enough that some time be devoted to the worship and service of God: for that must necessarily have been, had there never been any fourth command in the

¹ Mat. 15. 6.

world. It is also in vain to say that that law requires only a seventh part of time, and leaves it to us to determine what part that shall be: for God himself hath determined that for us, as every one may see. Nor will it be to any purpose for men to pretend they keep this law, when they keep another day which God hath appointed for work instead of the sabbath, and work on that day which God hath appointed for rest. Would this be understood as a just observation of a law amongst men? If a day of fasting or thanksgiving were appointed by publick authority; would it excuse any who neglected the observation of that determinate day, which was appointed by authority, to say they kept a day, tho it were not the precise day appointed? Would this way of reasoning do amongst men? And thus can it be called obedience to the fourth command, to keep another day than that which God hath required therein? Is keeping the first day of the week obedience to that law which requires our keeping the seventh? Then Jeroboam said well, that he obeyed the law of God in keeping the feast on the eighth month, because he kept it on one of the months of the year, tho the law appointed it should be kept on the seventh^m. Men do not trifle so in the ob-

^m 1 Kings 12. 32, 33.

servance of human laws : why should they then trifle with the laws of God ? Every one understands, if such a law requires such a day of the week and month to be observed, what the meaning of it is. And why should it be supposed so difficult in this case, of keeping the sabbath, when God speaks in the most decisive terms that can be ? Can it be supposed that this law is partly vacated, or abolished, when our Saviour says, that *not one jot or tittle of this law shall pass away : heaven and earth may sooner pass away than this law ?* Is there any place in the New Testament wherein this is precisely declared to be abolished ? On the contrary, did not our Saviour and his own apostles practise this law punctually and precisely ? Is there any instance of the Jews taxing them with the breach of any one of these laws, from any fair colour and pretence ? It is not therefore a sufficient excuse for men to say they keep some part or some parcel of the law, when our Saviour declares the whole is obligatory on us ; and *not one jot or tittle of it is to be abolished.* Does not the apostle James say the same thing, and declare, that *he who offends in one point, is guilty of all ;* that is, violates the whole law ; because it is the same authority that enjoins all ? I have not time to insist farther on this argument. But I suppose what hath been said already, is sufficient

cient to decide the question. For if it be true, as I think hath been proved to you, that the ten commandments are that law which our Saviour speaks of in our text; and if it be true, that *not the least letter, or particle of this law shall pass away*; nay, and *that heaven and earth may sooner pass away, than this law shall fail*; and that this signifies that its duration must be perpetual thro'out all ages of the world: then it follows, by the clearest consequence that can be, that this precept, among the rest, must have the same force and the same duration.

The end of the second VOLUME.



Gen. XV. of the world. I think it is
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true, as I think I have proved to you,
that the ten commandments are the law
which our Saviour speaks of in our text;
and it is true, that we the day, and
particular that I shall say; may, and
that God and man may join in
them this law shall fall; and that the
rites that its duration must be perpetual
throu all ages of the world: there is
now, by the clearest consequence that can
be, that this precept among the rest, must
have the same duration.

12 JY 62

The end of the second VOLUME.

